

Testimony on HB 6439: Ian Melchinger, Music Haven Parent

For inclusion in the public hearing of February 18, 2021

To the good people of the Appropriations Committee, and to Committee Chair Toni Walker:

It is tempting to write that *You Forgot Music Haven* in your budget this year.

In the light of last year's promises, and the disappointing failure to execute those promises, it is impossible to see the neglect of Music Haven in Bill Number HB6439 as a mere mistake.

It seems clear that there is an effort, implicit or explicit, to save the public face by claiming to fund Music Haven, and at the same time enjoy the cash value of leaving Music Haven gutted and empty. You should find both this public-relations failure, and the grimmer intent it suggests, unacceptable. There is still time to rescue the situation. Please listen.

Music Haven has changed the shape and face of my family. Thanks to Music Haven's amazing power as a hub of diversity, equity, and inclusion; thanks to Music Haven's irrefutable golden standards as a top-level teaching program that changes lives; thanks to the real, kind, and purposeful community created by this unique organization, my family was able to bring a Music Haven student into our home, out of his foster-care situation, and enrich all of our lives with his spirit and intelligence. **This is not an unusual story.** We are not special. This organization is special, and you cannot take it for granted or cast it aside while looking the other way.

You cannot possibly deny the value created by Music Haven. Whether you enjoy anecdotes or hard educational and socioeconomic data; whether you love music or are deaf to everything but the bottom line; whether you care about the future of children in New Haven or serve some other priority; this is money promised, money promised well, and money that invests in a future with provable advantage to many facets of our city.

You have a chance to do as you say, to act honorably, and to follow through on your commitment to these children. There is no way to rationalize or excuse a failure to appropriate this funding to Music Haven, without resorting to the most soul-crushing cynicism. If you have a legitimate reason to deny this funding, be honest and transparent about it. That is a challenge you cannot answer, because Music Haven has earned the trust of the State year after year; Music Haven has already rescued, dignified, and empowered the minds and hearts of too many children for you to bury them under a bit of line-item misdirection. Music Haven deserves this funding, and everyone knows it. Will you act on what we all know?

You forgot Music Haven, but Music Haven has not forgotten the children in its care. When I ask my new son Robert how he feels about his city, his home, what can he say? Please do not mark yourselves as his enemy by hiding your budgetary maneuvers through unconvincing claims of

oversight. Your actions today *do* risk overlooking these children, not from innocent error but from arrogant disinterest. Please get it right this year. Please do what you say you will do.

Please imagine these children as they grow: their confidence, their skill, their care in giving back to our communities. That growth needs this funding. These children will grow up with music in their hearts: what song will they play for you?

Thank you for understanding the need for honorable action with Bill HB 6439.

Respectfully yours,

Ian Melchinger

Music Haven parent of Isabel and, now, of Robert

Hopkins School Faculty

Lifelong resident of New Haven