



Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee on H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

March 9, 2021

Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Christine Baptiste-Perez, and I am a resident of Bridgeport, Connecticut. I am here to oppose H.B. 6439 and Governor Lamont's proposed education budget. I'm also asking you to modify the budget to align with S.B. 948, which is currently in the Education Committee.

Connecticut law imposes an affirmative constitutional obligation on the legislature to provide a “substantially equal educational opportunity for all public-school children.” Sheff v. O’Neill, 238 Conn. 1 (1996). Connecticut has an affirmative constitutional obligation to provide all public-school children with substantially equal educational opportunities. C.G.S. Const. Art. 1, §§ 1, 20; Art. 8, § 1. However, the sad reality is most Black, Brown, and low-income students are not receiving the funding needed for true equal educational opportunity. Connecticut has failed to uphold its end of the law to its residents. Ironically, Connecticut spends more on educating affluent white children than low-income children and children of color. Connecticut spends 640 million more dollars to educate white students than students of color.

Education is critical to the success of all children. It is hard to conceptualize how our State has failed its duty, despite the clear legal mandate. This educational inequality has directly impacted my family and friends. I have friends who are low-income and of color that have made incredible sacrifices to try to get “the best Bridgeport education” for their children. I know parents that drive their children to the more affluent parts of Connecticut for public school. Why? Because their neighborhood public school is underfunded and academically does not perform well. I know parents that have placed their children in charter schools for the same reasons. As a matter of fact, I placed my child in a charter school for that reason. The law does not permit forum shopping for a better legal outcome. It is unfair that the current law forces people of color and low-income people to shop around for better educational opportunities because the local public schools are poorly funded and consequently poorly performing. All public schools should be equitably funded. This injustice should not exist.

I know Connecticut can live up to its constitutional obligation and provide equitable educational opportunities for all public-school children if it passes S.B. 948. Please modify the proposed budget to reflect the values of justice and equity in education.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership on this issue.

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