



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

Pastor Trevor Beauford, Senior Pastor of Union Baptist Church, Hartford, CT

March 9, 2021

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

I am Rev. Trevor Beauford, Senior Pastor of Union Baptist Church, Hartford, where I have been blessed to serve since Christmas Day 2016.

I have the pleasure of speaking before you not only as a member of FaithActs for Education, but also as a clergy leader in The Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, representing over 40 diverse multi-faith and multi-ethnic faith communities and allied institutions throughout Greater Hartford. GHIAA is proud to stand beside the countless organizations, faith leaders, and voters across this state demanding an end to discrimination in education funding.

What unifies us today is that we know the power that education has. It has literally taken many of us out of poverty in one generation.

I'm here to oppose H.B. 6439, 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.

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* ended legal segregation of public schools. In 1996's *Sheff v. O'Neill*, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that school districting based on town lines, causing racial isolation, was unconstitutional. Yet here we are 66 and 24 years later and our schools are more separate and more unequal than they were before.

In Hartford, the average household income is \$36,000. In West Hartford, it's over \$104,000. This wealth gap leads to an opportunity gap that is plaguing our school system.

And the pandemic has only exasperated these issues. Hartford Public Schools estimate that students who live in the city of Hartford missed an average of 1 in 5 days during the first semester. That's one day a week. More than 60% of students in district schools have been chronically absent. And 1,300 students don't attend a single day of school within a week.

In 2007, the high school graduation rate in Hartford was close to 27%. Since then major reforms and efforts to improve education have brought the graduation rate up to over 70%, which still isn't good



enough. And the pandemic has made it worse. Our superintendent estimates that at best, 40% of high school seniors will graduate this year.

This would never happen 5 minutes away in West Hartford. The governor and the legislature have championed connectivity and workforce development, yet our kids have never been so disconnected, so disengaged, and so unprepared for the workforce.

So I'm asking you to do one simple yet mighty thing: make history.

And I know a little something about history. Not long ago I taught history in public schools.

My students and I broke open the stories of the past to see how they can be relevant for our lives today and to discern the lessons that can guide us tomorrow.

We've already learned the lessons of *Brown v. Board* and *Sheff v. O'Neill*. And we mustn't repeat history.

By opposing HB 6439 and most importantly creating an equitable budget, you will etch your names in the history books alongside those who stepped up to do what is right, to do what is just, even when it's hard.

So when tomorrow's children ask, "When you were in the Legislature, what did you do in the fight for my education," you can proudly proclaim, "I said NO to HB 6439 and modified the proposed budget to reflect the values of justice and equity in education."

Thank you.

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