

Written Testimony in response to the Governor's proposed budget for Elementary and Secondary education in Connecticut

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committees :

My name is Lillian Bertram. I am a first year student at the University of Hartford, majoring in Entrepreneurial Studies with a minor in Business Analytics and Managerial Economics. I am writing to you today to express my disappointment regarding the Governor's budget on education. The Governor's budget unfortunately does not address the chronic nature of underfunded schools. It seeks to put a bandaid on the issue worsened by COVID. It isn't enough. Transformation can begin by rejecting the Governor's proposed budget for education and by passing a budget with significantly more long-term and systemic support for our schools. Currently, there is legislation in the education committee SB948 that helps address these disparities, reducing the state's racial funding gap by 68% and makes sure students are at the center of the conversation about education funding. I'm hoping with your help, the Governor's budget can better fund schools across Connecticut.

Throughout my educational career, my mother always instilled in me that my intelligence would always be my way out. It would be my way out of social injustice, my way out of poverty, and my way out of life's stress. With that being said, I pushed myself to be a straight A student in elementary, middle school, high school, and now college. Although I was able to excel in school, other students of color weren't doing the same. For a very long time, I ignorantly blamed them for not taking initiative and improving their lives with the opportunities our ancestors fought for. What I failed to see is that they *were* "succeeding". They were succeeding at failing because the system was created for that purpose: for them to fail.

In elementary school, I was labeled as a "gifted and talented" student. With the praise of my school and my mother, I quickly jumped into that role, and I let those titles guide me through my education. However, what happens to the students that aren't labeled as gifted and

talented? Those students begin to fall into what is called learned helplessness. These students are never nurtured to believe that they are anything more than average or below average, and that follows them throughout their lives. Most of the students that were labeled “gifted and talented” were white. In middle school, most of the students that were in honors classes were not students of color, and the same goes for high school. What I find astonishing is that minority students made up a significant number of students in the school, yet, they weren’t given the luxury of being in many AP or honors courses.

The disgusting part about all this is that I was conditioned to believe that I was better than these students. I will never forget my principal telling me that 99% of the students just didn’t think like me, and I need to remember that. What that principal got wrong is that these students do think like me, and have the ability to, but they were never given the resources to do so.

Now, as a first year student in a business school, I’m usually about 1 of 2 black kids in each of my classes. I find that my white counterparts were given numerous business opportunities and classes in high school setting them up to already excel in their business majors. Meanwhile, I feel like I’m playing catch up. I’m now encountering topics that my professors discuss. I’m now hearing about business clubs such as DECA that I would have joined in high school if given the opportunity. Why is it now, while being a college student, that I’m encountering all the opportunities I could have had as a high schooler?

Things have to *transform* for the better, and I refuse to say “change for the better” because *change* insinuates a minor modification. Transformation holds greater power. Transformation is about modifying the foundation of education, and making it better long term.

I don’t want to hear another student of color say “school is not for me.” I need to hear them saying, “school helped me find me.” I don’t want to see another student go unlabeled as gifted and talented because we all are. We just need educators that tap into that. I don’t want to see another student miss out on opportunities. It is our job to make sure students are properly funded to seek all the clubs, organizations, and classes that spark their academic interest. It is a myth to believe that to educate is just to teach. To educate is to develop students mentally, emotionally, physically, and to help them find their love for learning. The time to educate is now. I am counting on you to make the right decisions and to give all students a fighting chance

to excel. Thank you!