



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

Brandon Clark, Chief of Staff, FaithActs for Education,

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 Brandon Clark and I am a father of two, soon to be three, a Bridgeport resident, and Chief of Staff at FaithActs for Education.

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today. I'm 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.

I am relatively new to FaithActs, having joined last August. But I am not new to Connecticut.

I was raised by a single mom whose dream was for me to attend college. At the age of 17, her dream came true and I left home to attend Sacred Heart University where my plan was to play football, earn a teaching degree, and move back to Boston to teach and coach.

During my freshman year, I took a work-study job in the Bridgeport public schools, a job I would keep my entire time at Sacred Heart. I worked with the same 5th grade teacher for three out of my four years in college. She was a rockstar. She cared deeply about her students, worked hard to reach each and every one of them and shed tears when we discussed the challenges they faced.

Every single year I worked in those classrooms, I worked with kids who shared a similar and heartbreaking story. Without fail, I would start the year working with a 5th grader who was 12 or 13 years old, in his second round of 5th grade and could not read.

This experience changed my view on education forever. I struggled to comprehend how public schools could create both a 17 year old college freshman (myself) and a 12 year old 5th grader who couldn't read.

It blew me away, broke my heart, made me angry, and told me my career path needed to be in urban education, and now in education advocacy.

After college I worked with Bridgeport youth in a variety of school and nonprofit settings before moving to New York City for six years to continue my career in education, working with some of the



most successful education organizations in the city. This past summer, I returned to Bridgeport to be closer to family.

Despite moving back to a GREAT neighborhood, our neighborhood schools' "Great Schools" score is a three out of ten. When we shared news about our return to Bridgeport with friends and family, the almost universal response was: what are you going to do for your kids' school?

Ultimately, after a long debate, my wife and I chose to enroll our children in a private school rather than an under resourced public school. As you know, that is not a privilege afforded to all. Many of the people we serve are unable to make the same decision for their children and that's simply not fair.

The hard truth is the systems responsible for educating low-income Black and Brown children fail more than they succeed and reek of racism and classism.

They give suburban kids all the opportunities in the world while sticking Black and Brown kids with whatever might be left.

As I've learned more, I can see clearly that was not unintentional. The funding formula makes it that way... ON PURPOSE.

We ALL know it's wrong. We ALL know it doesn't have to be this way. But only you can make certain that the injustice ends now. Students of color and those from low income families have been sold short year, after year, after year, after year, after year, after year. And now, after years of hard-work, advocacy, and the election of legislative champions that are on this call, you can change that.

I've heard Governor Lamont say he wants to make sure people want to move to and stay in Connecticut. I get that. I'm one of those people.

And yet, the state has not fully taken responsibility for the state of its schools. Far too many children cannot read. The public schools in Bridgeport and in communities of color across the state are still woefully underfunded.

Which makes me wonder, who is it Governor Lamont wants to move here? Is it people like me, who want to live in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury and are committed to making our communities better?

Or is he just looking to attract people just to places like Westport, Fairfield and Glastonbury?



This is a crucial moment in our history. You have an opportunity to eradicate once and for all a racist and classist funding structure that mistreats low-income Black and Brown children.

It's in your hands. We're here to help.

Thank you.

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