



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 Rachel Cunningham-Exavier, and I'm from Stratford, CT. I'm testifying 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 was born in Stamford and raised in Bridgeport, CT. I did not understand what that meant academically until I got into college. My entire primary and secondary education was in Bridgeport Schools. It was the only education I know until college. In Bridgeport schools I excelled. I was at the top of my class all the way through and even became salutatorian in high school. I graduated with such elation as I spoke about what high school was like in front of my classmates and our guests. That confidence deflated when I entered college that September. I went to Central Connecticut State University and I felt defeated my first semester. I was studying and preparing for tests and exams and to my dismay and heartache, my best would get me D's and F's. I would talk to my other friends from Bridgeport high schools and it was the same for them.

That is when I noticed how being from Bridgeport meant public schools were different educationally. The friends I made from surrounding towns in Connecticut did not have to study as hard, go to every academic tutor or center, and/or struggle the way myself and others from the inner city had to struggle. I had to watch my High school friends less tenacious than I was end up on academic probation in college, fail out of school, and then struggle to pay back their student loans because the system that was supposed to help them, failed them. And I would have gotten solace if it had changed, but our youth in Bridgeport, CT still are being failed with a lackluster education and wickedly insignificant resources. But if you go one mile over, children in Fairfield, Trumbull, and Stratford are thriving. This is not our youth's fault. It is your fault for failing them with a system that is unjustly and unfairly designed for inner cities where many of our children of color receive their education.

Years later, I am married with a daughter and would like nothing more than to live in a city that I love. However, a system that failed me will not fail my children. So, I have to grapple every time I go to look for my future home with this taunting me "No Rachel, you love Bridgeport, but Camille would not get the education she needs." Why, Why, do I have to do this? Why, are you saying children in other areas are worth more than the children in places like Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury? Why? Are the children in those areas less than worthy of adequate education...Because our current system is saying they are. I'm asking you to help make Connecticut a more just and equitable place to live.

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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