

Written 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

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

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I am the President & Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now and a parent in the Bridgeport Public School system. In addition to sending my children to Bridgeport Public Schools, I am also a third generation Harfordite, the third generation in my family to go to Hartford Public High School, and a proud supporter of public schools. My Aunt Carol Gale is currently the President of the Hartford Teacher's Union, my mom has been a school nurse for Hartford Public Schools for close to 30 years, and five of my aunts work in education.

Founded in 2016, Bridgeport Generation Now is a grassroots, member-based organization with over 300 members, 90% of whom are Bridgeport residents. Our mission is to strengthen civic engagement in ourselves and our communities to build the power we need to dismantle systemic racism and corruption in Bridgeport - so that we can build the just, equitable, and livable city we know is possible. Public education that meets all of our students' and families needs and addressing racial equity in education head on are key to that vision and a true investment in our city's future.

I am testifying in opposition to H.B. 6439 and in opposition to Governor Lamont's proposed education budget, which freezes the ECS formula for two years. Governor Lamont has a moral obligation to use the COVID-19 relief funds for that purpose - relief from this global pandemic that has laid bare the already deeply entrenched inequities within our small state. I'm also asking you to modify the budget to align with S.B. 948, which is currently in the Education Committee.

While I am a strong advocate for public education, I also understand the promise and purpose of the Charter School movement, as my aunt was part of the staff that opened Breakthrough Charter in Hartford in the early 90s. The promise and purpose was always to provide innovative approaches to education that met the needs of students, particularly those that Connecticut's state-funded public education system - and the state legislatures - kept neglecting.

Leveraging private dollars, these education reformers saw a way to create opportunities in a state that many of us know is one of the most racist states in the entire country. And the outcome of that movement is - sometimes it has worked, and often times it hasn't. And that is because Charters schools - and many "reform" policies over the last 20 years - and Governor Lamont's current budget proposal - ultimately do not solve for what is at the root and heart of all the passionate activism and advocacy - our state's deeply entrenched, hyper local system of school segregation. And these generational fights over charter vs public, ECS formulas, and such keep good people and parents fighting among each other and not attacking the root

causes - and the winners are and continue to be our state's predominantly white, wealthy communities

In Bridgeport, for example although we have many charter schools, with the decline of manufacturing, came white flight and fortified housing discrimination in Fairfield County. Bridgeport's public education system crumbled under the competing pressures and strained tax dollars, and students have been left dramatically underserved for decades. And so although we are heavily taxed at the highest mill rates in the entire state, property-poor Bridgeport is unable to keep up with the demands of our high-need student population - and has made millions of dollars of drastic cuts since I moved there in 2013.

As progressives who abhor racism and racial segregation we must be united in one message. My hope is that we all can come together united under one common vision - and that is to **build a new system in this state that creates public high-quality, equitably-financed, and racially and economically integrated schools for all children in Connecticut that meet students' needs.**

The initial CJEF ruling was a moment of promise for Connecticut. But our state Supreme Court ruled otherwise. Which has left that burden up to you - the legislature. And so it is upon you to see through the noise and to ask yourselves - does Governor Lamont's proposed budget really seek to end the entrenched racial and economic segregation within our state's education system? Does it come close to meeting the needs of all students? And does it sustain the commitment and promise of our multiracial democracy, which is that we are very publicly "in this together."

In order to end this ever-evolving racist system that guarantees the outcome of deep racial disparities in our state, we must enact anti-racist laws and policies - and yes, budgets - in Connecticut. And anti-racist budgets are ones that put our state's resources in place to END racial and economic disparities in our public education system once and for all.

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

[Callie Gale Heilmann](#), Bridgeport Generation Now