

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 LaToya Ireland and I live in Waterbury, CT born and raised. I graduated from Wilby High School, my daughter also graduated from Wilby High School who is now a freshman at Post University and another daughter who attends North End Middle School.

I am writing to you today to express my disappointment regarding the Governor's budget on education, and my optimism for a better path forward. Far too long generations of students, many of who are black and brown have suffered from inequitable systems, Connecticut's education funding and systemic racism. Black and brown families and families living in poverty have been under the umbrella of the chronic underfunding of our schools for decades, and now have to bear the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, COVID-19 has shown that the way public education is funded in CT unmistakably encompasses systemic racism. Students and teachers now have to adjust to remote learning using technologies and resources that they don't even have. 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.

For the last 12 months it has been made clear that our schools need to be funded fully, equitably and immediately! How can we expect for our children to succeed and reach their fullest potential when they don't receive equitable education funding, which includes resources and tools that will give them the opportunity to do so? I ask that during the 2021 legislative session that policymakers address the funding disparities in education funding. Our students deserve to be funded based on what they need in order to be successful in and outside of the classroom. The racial funding gap in Connecticut is a pervasive and systemic problem. Our school districts that have the majority student populations black and brown spend \$2,300 less per student compared to the districts that have a majority of white student population. There is a \$639 million funding gap between Connecticut districts that serve a population that is majority white versus those that serve a majority of black and brown population. Our students deserve better, their families deserve better. Our schools, our students and our communities need change that they can see. There have been many conversations, town halls and strategy sessions, and yet 2021 we are still here. Change can begin rejecting the Governor's proposed budget for education and by passing a budget with significantly more

long-term and systemic support for our schools. For example, there's currently 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 am counting on you to make the right decisions and to give all students a fighting chance to excel.

Thank you for your time, and urge you to think bolder than the Governor's proposed budget for education.

Best Regards,
LaToya Ireland