

Veronica Rosario, East Hartford

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing, Tuesday March 9, 2021

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

Good afternoon and thank you Co-chairs Senator Osten, Representative Walker for the opportunity to provide testimony here today. My name is Veronica Rosario, I am a Parent Fellow of ConnCAN and represent the Town of East Hartford. I am also a widowed mother of two wonderful boys. A senior at East Hartford High School and a 6th grader at Sunset Ridge Middle School in East Hartford. I work as a Pre-K, Para-Educator at the Early Childhood Learning Center, also part of East Hartford Public Schools. I am writing to you today to express my disappointment regarding the Governor's budget on education, and my optimism for bolder action.

In 2015, I moved from Puerto Rico to East Hartford seeking better medical attention for my son, who was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Though medical resources and family support dictated where we would live, the choices I had for my children's education were disconcerting. This provoked a great deal of distress because I did not understand how the school districts were set up. Having them being categorized by "hear say" as great, bad or good enough did not help either.

In the time that I have lived here I have come to this conclusion. The district that has the funds does not have the needs, and the district that has the needs does not have the funds. That being said, equity can not be achieved when it is measured by income.

My school district has made headway in moving the needle towards providing an equitable education for our students. It would go faster if it had the budget to enhance its efforts. East Hartford Public Schools mission is to deliver a high quality learning

experience for every child, every day because their vision is to have schools that are the pride of their community.

Connecticut spends about \$17,506 on average per pupil. How does that compare to West Hartford (\$17,245) Hartford (\$17,261) and East Hartford (\$14,747) or even Glastonbury (\$17,874). Populations and demographics are different, but the human being, meaning the child, is the same. For education to be equitable it needs to adapt and be agile with the community it services. For example in the past 5 years alone East Hartford has diversified immensely. We have received an influx of students from Hartford that had to relocate because of housing issues and from Puerto Rico because of Hurricane Maria. A diverse amount of needs in a short amount of time but yet the same budget to accommodate all. The Governor's budget does not adequately illustrate the urgency of equitable funding for schools. It isn't long term and it isn't acceptable.

The education committee's SB948 ensures students have what they need for decades to come.

SB948 makes some significant improvements to the education funding system. First, it simplifies the formula by including all public schools. No longer do we have to debate one school type over another. Next, it sends more money where it's needed most: for students in concentrated poverty and English Language Learners. Finally, it sends the needed money now. It does not wait another ten years to phase-in. If the amount of money that is distributed among the school districts is equitable to the needs that it has, wouldn't that serve our children more effectively? Wouldn't that support our teachers and make all districts more attractive to work for?

We must pass a budget with systemic support for our schools. Please make the right decisions and give all students a chance to showcase their inherent potential.

Being proactive in mitigating disparities among ALL of our children is imperative. This is the moment in time that change should and can occur. Let's maximize this opportunity and make a difference.

Once again thank you for this opportunity.