

**Barbara Ruggiero**  
**Appropriations Committee Testimony**  
**SUPPORT: Executive Budget Charter School Per Pupil Increase**  
**Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

Good evening Chairs Osten and Walker and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. It is nice to see you again Senator Hartley and Representative Reyes.

I am Barbara Ruggiero, founder and Executive Director of Brass City Charter School, Waterbury's only charter school which opened in 2013 with grades Pre-k through 1. We have rolled out a new grade each year since then and will be graduating our first eight grade class this June.

BCCS' mission is to provide a rigorous academic and holistic social-emotional learning program that will eliminate the achievement gap for underserved students. Ten years ago, I am embarrassed to say, I had no understanding of the profound achievement gap that exists in CT. Why would CT have a gap that was so significant? Surely CT students are as capable as students from other states. And I discovered that charter schools have been addressing those disparities for over 20 years. Our state's public charter schools overwhelmingly serve low-income students and students of color which is true for BCCS which is highly representative of our City's population in terms of poverty and race. But because of how CT funds public education, the 11,000 mostly low-income, predominantly black and brown public charter school students have been profoundly underfunded. These students are more than deserving of equitable funding. Charter schools are defeating racist stereotypes that seek to put limits on children's futures. We believe at BCCS that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, religion, ethnicity, or gender can grow, achieve, and be successful.

When we first opened, we had two months to announce that opening to the public. Despite the fact that we were an unknown, untested commodity, we ended our first lottery with a wait list. Last year we had over 600 students on our waitlist and with each year that list grows. It was clear that families want choice for their children. Throughout CT the demand for public charter schools has rapidly increased over the past two years. The latest waitlist includes over six thousand names, representing the families demanding access to these schools. To reiterate, public charter schools provide quality education to students who often don't have access to great schools.

This year in Governor Lamont's proposed budget there is a per-pupil increase for charter school students. This increase will finally bring our students to the state's foundation amount for education funding of \$11,525. The importance of this increase cannot be overstated. However, our students at Brass City, like so many other students in Waterbury, have unique challenges that will still be left unaddressed even with this funding increase. 64% of charter school students come from low-income families and many live in communities affected by high concentrations of poverty. To truly be able to best serve our students and properly support them both academically and emotionally, charter schools need to be fully incorporated into the ECS formula and have the additional student need weighted funding applied.

This legislative session I implore this committee to not only stand with the Governor and support the proposed per-pupil increase for charter school students but to pursue equity at a deeper and more inclusive level but funding all public school students through the ECS formula.

Thank you for your consideration.

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