

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

It is no secret Connecticut has one of the largest income and achievement gaps in the country. Varick AME Memorial Zion Church believes that by investing in our children's education, we inherently make a significant investment in our state's future. We know our elected leaders are facing tough decisions about how to best appropriate funds. We just ask that you recognize our children's education as high priority while doing so. Investments in students that attend all schools of choice, such as magnet schools and charter schools is an investment in the future of Connecticut. Research proves that students thrive when they have access to options that fit their learning styles best.

While Varick believes it is necessary to provide parents with a robust set of choices for magnet and charter schools, we find that many choice conversations sadly often end up divisive. We should direct our conversations toward making sure all children have great opportunities and ultimately educational success. It is unacceptable that all Connecticut public schools are underfunded, especially charter schools.

Over 80% of public charter school students are students of color and nearly 60% are low income. How can we tell families that poverty isn't destiny and they can achieve the American Dream if we cannot even provide adequate funding for their child's education? What message are we sending to the families of New Haven and others across Connecticut who need the most help when we continually tell them to make due with less, time and time again? What message are we sending to the students that attend public charter schools when we decide to fund them less than the minimum foundation amount of \$11,525 per student as dictated in the state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula.

Our hope is that you make the best decisions for our children. Many new promising proposals and ideas have been included in the Governor's budget. Please equitably fund Booker T. Washington Academy students and the 10,000+ public charter school students across the state by supporting Governor Lamont's proposed increase to charter school funding. It is imperative to the future of our state that public charter school students be given the same chances and opportunities as students attending traditional public schools.

We believe every child in a charter school should have an opportunity to continue learning in their school and every public charter school should receive adequate funding to educate those students. This funding should not be dependent on which school constituents decide to enroll their students. We ask that you do the right thing and fund our schools equitably.

Sincerely,
Rev. Kelcy Steele
Pastor
Varick AME Zion Church

Board Chair
Booker T. Washington Academy

