



**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**

March 9, 2021

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

I'm here to oppose H.B. 6439, specifically Governor Lamont's proposed education budget. I'm also asking you to modify the budget to align with S.B. 948, which is currently in the Education Committee because it's the right thing to do.

My name is Doran Wright and I'm Pastor of Neighborhood Church Black Rock in Bridgeport. I'm a founding member of P.T. Partners, the Connecticut Director of Straight Ahead Ministries, serve on the Juvenile Review Board, and volunteer at Geraldine Claytor Magnet Academy. I'm also a member of the Bridgeport School District's Social Emotional Learning Implementation Team and facilitate restorative practices and the RULER approach, so I have a comprehensive view of the complex realities confronting Bridgeport youth.

One of the most important things that I do is bike riding across the city with Bridgeport youth. Watching these young, mostly Black and Latino boys, precisely and effortlessly glide down the pavement, pop wheelies, laugh, take risks, and experience bliss, are some of the most powerful and transformative moments of my life. Every day my deepest prayer is that they experience that level of joy in all aspects of life.

And some of my toughest days are when the group gets smaller. I see the impact firsthand that housing, deportation, and the juvenile justice system have on their lives. They have hopes and dreams, they want to start businesses and families. They are brilliant.

Education is one of the most powerful ways to divert youth from the juvenile justice system. It is the way to block the school-to-prison pipeline, which although smaller, still sucks in way too many kids from Bridgeport and my own neighborhood where I live and serve. And it makes me wonder how the wealthiest state in the country spends more to incarcerate our future leaders than to send them to college.

You see, there's a \$640 million gap between the way Connecticut funds schools that educate mostly white kids versus schools with 25% or more kids of color.



This is starkly evident in Bridgeport. On Park Avenue in Fairfield County, a school educating a Bridgeport child receives \$14,400 for their education, while a Fairfield child receives \$18,900. And a charter school kid in Bridgeport gets \$11,000.

These children are neighbors. They might play together. And yet our state treats them so very very differently.

This is racist. It's classist. It's shameful. And you have the power to do something about it.

You have the solution before you. Equitably fund Black, Brown, and low-income students in all public schools.

I'm not asking you to do this because it's easy, I'm asking you to do this because it's right.

Bishop Oscar Romero said: "A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed — what gospel is that?"

So I ask you, if you aren't willing to provoke, to unsettle, to get under someone's skin and to challenge the status quo, why are you occupying your seat?

As John Lewis said, "Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of [Connecticut]."

Please modify the proposed budget to reflect the values of justice and equity in education.

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