

Carl Highsmith Testimony for Monday 3/12

Good afternoon. My name is Carlton Highsmith. I am writing on behalf of Amistad Academy, and the many public charter schools across Connecticut in support of Senate Bill 1408, An Act Concerning Charter Schools.

Despite coming from humble beginnings, I now serve as the CEO of a successful, international company because of the great public schooling I had in my life. I know first-hand the life-changing impact that an excellent education can make, and that is why I am so passionate about finding ways to expand the educational opportunities of Connecticut kids—especially those from families trapped in cycles of poverty.

My journey as a supporter of Connecticut's public charter schools began several years ago when I first visited Achievement First's Amistad Academy in New Haven. I was frankly blown away by the dramatic results that this public school was achieving with its students and particularly impressed by the commitment of all of the adults in the school to ensuring every one of its students was on track for future success in college and the workplace. I was so moved by their hard work, vibrant academic culture and overriding commitment to success that I decided to join the school's Board of Directors in 2006.

Public charter schools like Amistad are changing the conversation about what is possible in our urban public schools. The driving principle behind their success is the same philosophy that I and most other business people have lived by in our work: give people the freedom to innovate and hold them accountable for getting results. "An Act Concerning Charter Schools" represents the next step in this compact between charter schools and the public.

As a Board member, I am very aware of the financial problems that Amistad currently faces. Connecticut's charter schools currently receive just \$8,000 per student, 30% percent less than the statewide average and 40% less than their district counterparts.

To make up this gap, we must raise \$4,000 in private funds for every student in Amistad. Combined with its sister school, Elm City College Prep, this means we must raise over \$3 million every year just to keep the doors to these public schools open. I am not sure how much longer we can continue to raise these funds and I am quite sure that without increasing charter school funding to the statewide average the Amistad model will not be able to continue to grow in our state.

Amistad Academy is well known for its motivational messages, including the slogan 'No Excuses.' At Amistad, there are No Excuses for missing school, for not doing your homework, or for being disrespectful. I believe that those of us who have the power to affect change are absolutely responsible for giving every child in our state equal opportunities for success – *No Excuses*. "An Act Concerning Charter Schools" is the right place to start in keeping this promise to our children.

Thank you for your time.

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:
Carl Highsmith

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