

**Testimony for the record by Eddie A. Perez**  
**Mayor, City of Hartford**  
**Submitted to:**  
**The Connecticut General Assembly**  
**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**  
**February 10, 2009**  
**Hearing on HB-5227, AN ACT ALLOWING TOWNS TO CREATE**  
**SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS THROUGH MUNICIPAL BONDING**

Good morning Chairs Hartley and Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB-5227, **An Act Allowing Towns to Create Scholarship Funds Through Municipal Bonding** or the Connecticut Promise Zones Bill. I am Eddie A. Perez, Mayor of the City of Hartford.

I am very proud to be here today. Last year I spoke to you about the Connecticut Promise Zones legislation and the tremendous positive impact it would have on communities like Hartford. I would like to thank this Committee along with those members of the House of Representatives who recognized that and championed this legislation last session. I would also like to commend Representative Roldan and Senator Fonfara for reviving the legislation this year.

I will be clear. This piece of legislation could be the most important bill that has ever been before your committee. This legislation creates an option for all municipalities to provide access to higher education. This could be monumental to children in Cities like New Haven, New London, Waterbury, New Britain, Bridgeport, Willimantic and Hartford.

During my administration the Hartford Public School System has been redesigned, placing a priority on increasing the number of our kids who go on to attend college. To that end, I have undertaken a number of initiatives. I have introduced a mandatory college preparation curriculum in all of our High Schools. I have also created the Hartford Youth Scholars Foundation which provides Hartford Public School students with access to over a dozen private colleges throughout Connecticut. In partnership with the State, The City of Hartford has opened a number of hugely successful and competitive Magnet and Charter Schools.

This legislation would provide The City of Hartford with its most effective tool for continuing progress in realizing our goal of making higher education a reality for all of our students.

However, this bill is not just about access to higher education. It is a different way of thinking about community development and education as a whole. While this is a municipal option, let me tell you how it will impact The City of Hartford.

Based on statistics after the successful Kalamazoo Promise, which I have included in the written version of my testimony, here is what this bill will do for Hartford.

- More integrated schools with a racial and socio-economic diverse student body.
- Increased graduation rates. And a rise in the graduation rate among African Americans & Latino Students.
- A decrease in the drop out rate.
- An increase in the number of students going to four-year colleges.
- An increase in home sales and home ownership AND a resulting growth of the grand list.
- New moderate income housing units.
- Retention of businesses and attraction of new businesses.

In short, this legislation won't just make a difference in the lives of our kids; it will make a difference in the lives of our communities. In this difficult economic climate there will be a significant amount of pressure to vote against this legislation, but I urge you to consider the incredible ramifications it can have.

I urge you to support HB-5227. Thank you for your time and I welcome questions.

#### Statistics

- Reverse in enrollment decline of Kalamazoo Public Schools and racial and socio-economic diversification of the student body; 11% increase in student enrollment after many years of decline. About 1,300 new students from 32 states and nine foreign countries registered in Kalamazoo public schools since the first scholarships were handed out in 2006 — the largest enrollment increase in 35 years.

- White student enrollment rose by 250, the first upsurge since the 1980s.
- Increased graduation rates by at least 16% and 43% rise in the graduation rate among African Americans.
- 500 students who would have dropped out in a typical year stayed in school instead.
- Increased percentage of Kalamazoo graduates applying to college by 7%, a figure which will grow with every coming year as newly enrolled Promise students continue to graduate in greater numbers.
- Home sales rose 6% and property values rose 7% overall, as the region around Kalamazoo experienced a 10 percent decline in sales.
- 200 housing units have gone up since 2006 and another 400 are on the way.
- Has helped city retain and attract new businesses.
- Potential for increase course offerings and efforts to close the achievement gap.
- Create a better educated workforce.
- Reduce the cost of higher education for residents.