



Board of Directors

Edith B. Cassidy
Chairwoman

Frances Newby
First Vice Chair and Secretary

Rev. Donald C. Luster
Second Vice Chair

Peter H. Roberge
Treasurer

Margie Powell
Immediate Past Chair

Stanley Bernard
Nancy D. Busch
Marta Calderón
Gina Dunston-Boone, M.D.
Mary E. Eady
Robert Francis
Linda Goldenberg
Marcy Hardt
Frances Haynes
Jack Hickey-Williams
Margaret Hiller
Alejandra Holway
Hernan Illingworth
Pastor Tyrone P. Jones, IV
Brian J. Langdon
Karen McIntosh
Nadine Nevins
Jane F. Norgren
Janice Park
Alonda T. Powell
Zoraida Reyes
Rev. Brian Schofield-Bodt
Rae A. Sharp
Gina LeVon Simpson
Ludwig Spinelli
Helen B. Wasserman
Scott K. Wilderman
Katherine S. Yacavone

TESTIMONY OF THE

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

TO THE

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 11, 2009

Marilyn Ondrasik
Executive Director

Barbara Edinberg
Assistant Director

Testimony of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition Before Appropriations Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony about the State Department of Education budget to the Appropriations Committee of the 2009 General Assembly.

We understand that these are very difficult economic times. We applaud Governor Rell for her desire to protect education from steep budget cuts. However, the cuts in her budget will harm the poorest school districts and impede their ability to raise student academic outcomes.

Level ECS Funding: We would like to point out, however, that level funding of the ECS grant to local school districts is, in fact, a 4-5% cut.

Level funding of ECS further perpetuates the gross inequities in education funding across our state. As recognized by the Governor's Education Finance Commission, Bridgeport is the most under-funded school district in the state. It should not be a matter of geography whether a student lives in a district that spends \$17,000 per student, or one that spend little more than half of that.

The State of Connecticut, with strong support from the General Assembly, started on a path two years ago to correct these inequities. Last year that start came to a halt. Last year's 4.4% increase in ECS and this year's level funding perpetuate these inequities. They disproportionately impact the state's poorer, urban school districts.

Priority School District Funding Cut: The Governor's proposed budget cuts Priority School District funding by 6%. This is the very funding that can help the state's poorest school districts provide the remedial and support services that their students desperately need. Priority School District Funding should be increased by 4-5% just to help districts keep the critically needed programs it funds continuing.

School Readiness Funding Cut: A 6% cut for Priority School Districts along with likely reductions for Head Start in the federal stimulus package means that fewer kindergarteners will enter Bridgeport schools with preschool learning that is necessary to help them succeed academically.

State Transportation Grants: Fully fund the cost of school busing. Because the state grants less than the full cost of school busing, the Bridgeport school district have removed most school busing for high school students. However, they are required under state law to provide school busing for charter high school students. This sets up an inequitable situation that could be fixed by fully funding the cost of school busing.

In Bridgeport, our schools have suffered more than \$36 million in cuts over the past five years. This now means that the Bridgeport schools have the fewest teachers and fewest administrators of all the urban districts. Supplies and educational materials are in short supply. Support services such as remedial tutoring have been cut substantially. Custodians and maintenance personnel have been cut. Secretaries, support staff, and paraprofessionals have been severely reduced. Our teachers teach under incredibly challenging circumstances with resources so scarce.

Meanwhile fuel, health care and other costs continue to rise. Our Mayor has now come back asking the Board of Education to cut another \$7 million over the next six months. It is not clear what there is that can still be cut, except to shut down the schools entirely for days at a time to save money.

Lastly, it has not worked to combine needed property tax relief to our cities and towns with ECS funding. This new funding formula pits municipalities against their own schools. We strongly urge separation of education funding from property tax relief. All state education funding should be mandated to be passed through to fund the schools -- and there should be strong formulas with careful state verification for education funding requirements by municipalities out of their own tax revenues.

Thank you this opportunity to submit our testimony.

Marilyn Ondrasik
Executive Director
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
203-549-0075
mondrasik@bcacct.org

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition is a coalition of more than 80 member organizations dedicated to improving the well-being of Bridgeport's children through research, advocacy, community education and mobilization.