

# CBIA

*Connecticut Business & Industry Association*

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**Testimony of Jesmin K. Basanti  
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Before the Committee on Education  
Hartford, CT  
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**H.B. 5491 An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut**

Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann and other members of the Committee. My name is Jesmin Basanti and I am Staff Attorney for Education matters at the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA represents more than 10,000 companies throughout the state of Connecticut, ranging from large corporations to small businesses, but the vast majority of our members are small businesses of fifty or fewer employees.

Closing Connecticut's education achievement gap has been a priority of CBIA's for many years. A highly skilled workforce is critical to our economy and graduating with college and career ready skills is the new imperative for student success after high school. It continues to be a significant challenge, because the gap between minority students' performance in Connecticut and the state's average is the widest in the U.S.

**HB 5491** aims at meeting several of the priorities that CBIA members know are a must in order to for our students to have the best educational experience possible: higher standards for all students, providing *incentives for Advanced Placement courses*, developing effective teachers and administrators through *evaluations linked to students' progress*, excellent school leaders by promoting *an alternative route to certification for principals* and improving parent-teacher communication by having more conferences.

Through the years, the CBIA Education Foundation has brought many initiatives into Connecticut schools, including State Scholars, which raised academic standards and encouraged eighth grade students to take a more rigorous curriculum in high school, Vanguard Schools, which, with SDE and SERC recognized high performing schools that outperform their peers and most recently Project Opening Doors, CBIA's advanced placement STEM initiative. CBIA has been working on expanding student participation in Advanced Placement courses as one of six states to receive a National Math and Science Initiative grant. POD is a program initiated in 2007 to increase the number of Advanced Placement courses in math, English, and science and the number of low-income, minority and other underrepresented students enrolled in those rigorous courses. Connecticut results on AP tests in fact have climbed dramatically—with significantly greater representation of low income and minority students. It is changing

the culture surrounding advanced placement from a program only open to a select group of students to one where students from all backgrounds and income levels are given the extra support needed to succeed in AP classes and obtain a three or better on the College Board AP exams. Through this initiative, teachers receive excellent training on classroom strategies to succeed with non-traditional students; strategies which have proven successful in expanding enrollments and educational success. And it provides a strategy to help close the achievement gap by ensuring that students from urban or rural school systems who score a 3 or better on the AP exams are recognized by colleges and universities as meeting the same standard as students from suburban schools. In a state as divided as ours, this is critically important to ensuring that low-income, minority students are meeting the same requirements and mastering the same content as their peers from our higher performing districts.

We believe that the initiatives proposed in this bill will move Connecticut in the right direction. For this reason, we support the overall goals of HB 5491 and specifically §10 and urge your favorable passage of this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.