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Testimony of Mayor Bill Finch

Good Afternoon, Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Bill Finch and I am the Mayor of the City of Bridgeport. I am here today to testify on Raised House Bill 5491 –

Bridgeport is a City poised for educational transformation. Protecting our greatest resource – the children of the city of Bridgeport – is our most important task. Our current educational system is, as Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "economically unsustainable and morally unacceptable." "For our children to learn, grow and thrive, requires much innovation, creativity and thoughtful leadership. As Mayor, I must allow all of Bridgeport's students the opportunity to achieve and succeed.

Education is the Civil Rights issue of our time, and we must work together to effect the changes our children deserve. President Obama's Race to the Top program, has outlined reforms that we must address for large-scale federal funding. We can not afford to not make resist the necessary reforms and changes required. For many in Connecticut that system may seem successful, but for those children in Bridgeport, the system is broken.

I believe that we must look at all alternatives to educate our children. During these uncertain economic times we must consider any alternative which addresses the achievement gap. We must prepare students for higher education, with particular focus on those ideas and solutions which have a limited financial impact on our budget and examine alternative school choice through charter schools and parochial schools. If the Legislature thinks creatively we can utilize resources already in place to effectively educate our children.

For these reasons, I strongly support House Bill 5491 as written but encourage further examination and support of school choice alternatives. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.