

Calderon

Good evening,

My name is Francheska Calderon and I am a senior at Amistad- Elm City High School in New Haven. I want to thank you all for allowing me to speak today at the Education Committee hearing. I am here to testify on behalf of House Bill 5493 (An Act Concerning Strategic Planning in State Education Policy and Charter School Funding). I am proud to say that I am a member of the first graduating class of an Achievement First High School. I am even more proud to tell you that my entire senior class has been accepted to a four-year college. 100% of my peers have the choice to go to college next year.

I have been an Achievement First student for almost eight years. I became part of their family when I started attending Amistad Academy Middle School in

5th grade. Through that school I began to have a clearer understanding of what life is about. Many people who know me today can tell you that they notice a significant change in my character. I use to be very angry and concerned about others perception of me. Amistad helped me realize that life is not about others but about the achievements that I as an individual can accomplish. It helped me become more focused on my career and the opportunities I can look forward to in my future. Before entering Amistad I was reading below grade level and now I have been accepted to Providence College, University of New Haven, UConn and several others. Achievement Firsts' education helped me become a well rounded student and person as a whole.

My mom is really glad that my little brother, sister and I had the chance to attend a school like Amistad. My older brother and sister did not have this opportunity and were not able to make it to college.

Although Amistad-Elm City High is labeled a charter school it is still a public school. Charter schools deserve to be equally funded not just 75% of what traditional public school students are given.

Personally, I feel that it's just not fair. We all deserve equal money to be educated. It's frustrating to me that I go to school in a state that is only one of three states in this country that funds charter schools through an annual appropriation from state lawmakers. A 'Money Follows the Child' funding formula would allow more students like me and my

parents to make the choice for a high-quality education and begin down the path to college.

For the last several years, my peers and I have made this trip up to Hartford to beg for charter school funding changes. *This* is the year to make these changes. President Obama's Race to the Top competition could win Connecticut \$200 million. But there is an emphasis on charter schools in his competition, and our current funding system is hurting Connecticut's charter schools. Additionally, the proposed legislation would save Connecticut the \$186 million that it spends each year to double-fund students who leave traditional public schools for charter, magnet or technical schools. I know that it's a tough economic time in Connecticut, which is why the

proposed bill allows for a transition over several years.

I will graduate this year and it would be great if the students, who follow me, would not have to come here every year to fight for their public school education. We deserve to be kids, not lobbyists.

Thank you for your time this evening and for your consideration of House Bill 5493.