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BILL FINCH  
Mayor

Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Bill Finch and I am the Mayor of Bridgeport. HB 5493, "An Act Concerning Strategic Planning in State Education Policy and Charter School Funding" is a first step towards a more rational school funding system in our state and that is why I am here today to support its passage in this legislative session. It's no secret that our current ECS school funding system must be repaired. This is a view shared not just by people in Bridgeport, but in communities across the state.

A public school financing system where money follows kids, based on their learning needs would be an effective way to fund our public schools. After all, that was supposed to be the way that the ECS formula would work—but we all know that it's never been properly implemented. You have heard testimony before this committee that in effect we don't even have a formula anymore since we're just flat funding everyone where they were several years ago, no matter how many kids have moved around between schools and districts since then.

At this point pretty much everyone acknowledges that our funding system for charter schools is unfair and inefficient. Unfair since charters get only 75 cents on the dollar compared with other public schools, and inefficient because of how "hold harmless" provisions in ECS often mean that the state ends up paying twice for the same child.

But some will say that we can't fix the funding system for charter schools in isolation—that we have to fix school finance all at once. I don't disagree with that at all. And I also believe that there's no better way to ensure that we finally tackle the reform of our whole school finance system in the next several years than to pass this bill in this legislative session. This bill is about much more than simply fixing the funding system for charter schools. It is not intended to be implemented in isolation from much needed, comprehensive reforms to rationalize school finance so that money follows kids across Connecticut's whole school finance system—and this bill's passage this year would be a very strong signal of an intent to return to this larger task in the next two legislative sessions. And because passing this bill would not actually produce any fiscal impact on the state until 2011-12 and no fiscal impact on districts until 2012-13, there would be significant time to ensure the passage of these complementary, overall reforms in the next two legislative sessions.

Second, the Federal Government has made it more clear than ever that we here in Connecticut are going to lose out on all kinds of federal funding if we continue to be one of just three states in the country where money doesn't follow kids to charter schools. We've already lost out on \$200 million in Round I of Race to the Top and there's no way that keeping right on with business as usual is going to get us in the running for Round 2. Just last week President Obama announced a new \$900 million competitive fund for turning around the high schools in this country with the highest dropout rates—and we all know that unfortunately some of those high schools on that federal list are right here in CT, including in my community of Bridgeport. And guess what—states and school districts that want a shot at this money need to be able to show that they've cleared away the barriers to partnering with high performing charter schools as part of their turnaround efforts.

So this is not just about getting in the game for Race to the Top, it's about taking the unique opportunity we have in this legislative session to take a step forward towards fixing our broken school finance system overall. I urge you to support its passage, and then to work with me, your legislative colleagues and stakeholders from across the state to ensure that we use this as a launching pad to fix our school funding system once and for all in the next biennium. With such a looming funding crisis in our ECS system, we can't afford not to. Thank you.