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**Testimony of Jack Bryant  
President of the Stamford Connecticut NAACP  
Testifying in Support of Raised Senate Bill 1195  
Submitted to the Legislative Appropriations Committee  
March 24, 2011**



Good Evening Honorable Chair Toni Harp, Honorable Chair Toni Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee;

Greetings – My name is Jack Bryant and I serve in the capacity of President of the Stamford Connecticut NAACP. I am here today to support Raised Bill #1195, An Act Concerning School Finance Reform. The NAACP has Education as one of our highest priorities because providing quality education for all children is a civil right. Let me tell you. I am sick and tired of going to meetings across Connecticut to discuss the issue of living in one of the richest states and having the largest achievement gap in the country. I am sick and tired of going to these meetings because the outcome is always the same; we acknowledge that we have a major problem when it comes to educating our children. I do not have to go to a meeting to know this. I live in Stamford Connecticut. I have attended the public schools in Stamford Connecticut. I have a son and two daughters that have attended public schools in Stamford Connecticut. I know first hand that we have a problem that needs to be addressed when it comes to funding a child's education whether it be in the traditional public school, charter school, private school, etc. Education is the most important investment we make in our state's future, but it's where we're getting the worst return on our money. We continue to have the largest achievement gap in the country. There has got to be a change in the way we fund our education system.

I am now part of a committee in Stamford composed of the Mayor's office, members of the Board of Representatives, Board of Finance, Board of education, Parent Teacher Council and the Stamford Public Education Foundation. We are organizing and mobilizing regarding the CT Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF). Last March, in an historic decision, the CT Supreme Court ruled that ALL CT public school children have a constitutional right to a quality education. The CT Coalition for Justice in Education Funding brought this lawsuit on behalf of more than 100 cities, towns, and BOE's, including Stamford Connecticut. Like most states, CT has a funding formula which determines what the state should pay to the local districts for education. Theoretically, the State should pay about

50% of our costs. The statewide average is 38%. Stamford gets less than 7%. There are many reasons for this. First, the formula does not account for the actual costs to educate our children, particularly children with special needs. Additionally, many factors are taken into account in applying the formula, such as property values and income wealth of a town and the formula becomes skewed. Unfortunately for Stamford, these factors skew the formula in such a way as to give us less than 7%. However, the formula is inequitable for all districts because it simply does not accurately reflect what it actually costs to educate all children.

CCJEF sued the State and won the right to go to trial. The CT Supreme Court stated that "...the CT constitution guarantees CT's public school students educational standards and resources suitable to participate in democratic institutions, and to prepare them to attain productive employment and otherwise to contribute to the state's economy, or to progress on to higher education." However, the outcome of a lawsuit will take years if it is not settled. We are hoping that the State will settle this lawsuit and rework the funding formula.

Which brings me back to why we need Bill 1195 passed. It will replace the current funding mechanisms for public schools in Connecticut with a long-term, sustainable student-based school funding system. The new system is based on a simple, common sense concept: consistently fund students based on their learning needs at the public schools they actually attend.

When you have a current system in place that:

1. Fails to provide similar amounts of state aid for children with equivalent learning needs.
2. Fails to adequately account for town wealth.
3. Restrains public school choice.
4. Wastes precious education dollars.
5. Discourages transparency, efficiency and improvement.

You currently have a funding system that is not productive for our children. Let's do the right thing for our children. Let's pass CT Senate Bill 1195, An Act Concerning School Finance Reform.

Thank You,

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