



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE KELVIN ROLDAN**  
FOURTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 4029  
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

CAPITOL: 860-240-8500  
FAX: 860-240-0206  
E-MAIL: Kevin.Roldan@cga.ct.gov

DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER

**MEMBER**  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

**Representative Kelvin Roldán**

**Testimony Submitted to:**

**The Connecticut General Assembly**  
**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

Co-Chairs Sen. Bye and Rep. Willis, Sen. LeBeau and Rep. Candelaria, Sen. Boucher and Rep. LeGeyst, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB-5419, **AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT PROMISE ZONES.**

Passage of this bill would have a significant impact on communities across the state, particularly places like Hartford. This measure passed the House of Representatives two sessions ago.

I believe this bill addresses many of the questions that we grapple with everyday to address the needs of our constituents. This bill is not just about access to higher education; this bill is truly a different way of thinking about community development and education as a whole. The City of Hartford and communities across the state would benefit greatly from the passage proposal. I applaud Mayor DeStefano and the New Haven community for recently adopting this approach in partnership with Yale University.

## **Background**

This bill is modeled after the successful Kalamazoo Promise in Michigan. In November 2005 Kalamazoo established the Kalamazoo Promise, an unrestricted scholarship program, capitalized with private investment, guaranteeing a college scholarship to every graduate of the Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) in a Michigan public institution, approximately 10,500 students. The program differs from others in that the scholarship is not merit based. Since the inception of the Promise, many communities across the country have established similar programs.

## **Impact**

As a result of establishing this program, Kalamazoo has experienced an incredible change. Even in during the early stages of implementation, the results were promising:

- Reverse in enrollment decline of Kalamazoo Public Schools and racial and socio-economic diversification of the student body; 11% increase in student enrollment after many years of decline. About 1,300 new students from 32 states and nine foreign countries registered in Kalamazoo public schools since the first scholarships were handed out in 2006 — the largest enrollment increase in 35 years.
- White student enrollment rose by 250, the first upsurge since the 1980s.
- Increased graduation rates by at least 16% and 43% rise in the graduation rate among African Americans.
- 500 students who would have dropped out in a typical year stayed in school instead.
- Increased percentage of Kalamazoo graduates applying to college by 7%, a figure which will grow with every coming year as newly enrolled Promise students continue to graduate in greater numbers.
- Home sales rose 6% and property values rose 7% overall, as the region around Kalamazoo experienced a 10 percent decline in sales.
- 200 housing units have gone up since 2006 and another 400 are on the way.
- Has helped city retain and attract new businesses.
- Potential for increase course offerings and efforts to close the achievement gap.
- Create a better educated workforce.
- Reduce the cost of higher education for residents.

## **Connecticut Promise Zones**

I believe that during these difficult times the state needs to think differently about everything we do as a legislature. Allowing municipalities, particularly our cities to establish Promise Zones would be a boost for economic development based on the figures above. In addition, we have a significant obligation to our state to plan for the future. The majority of future jobs in our aging state will be held by young people in urban schools today. Let's make sure they are ready. This bill would provide them with that opportunity.

Thank you.