

# HIGHSMITH & Co.

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February 20, 2012

To: Senator Toni Harp & Representative Toni Walker  
From: Carlton L Highsmith  
Re: Statement in Support of Governor Malloy's Proposal for a \$2,600 Increase in Per Pupil Funding for Connecticut's Public Charter School Students

Thank you Senator Harp and Representative Walker for your longtime support of those programs that have served to improve the quality of education for so many of our children, particularly our minority children. I write to urge you to support the governor's proposal to increase the per pupil funding for Connecticut's public charter school students.

Five years ago (see attached), I delivered a statement to the Education Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature in support of Senate Bill# 1408. That bill failed to garner the needed support to become law and as a result, unfortunately, today fewer minority school children in Connecticut are receiving the kind of quality education that they will need to lead productive, rewarding and enriching lives. And regrettably during that time the academic achievement gap between minority students and white students in our state has continued to widen. For the past 5 years I have served on the board of directors of Achievement First, the charter management organization that operates high-performing public charter schools in Connecticut (New Haven, Bridgeport and Hartford), New York City and Rhode Island. I have seen first hand the consequences of Connecticut's current charter school funding formula and its adverse impact on so many urban families in search of a high-performing school option for their children. With more favorable student funding formulas existing in New York and now, Rhode Island, I have seen impressive growth in the number of public charter schools that are opening and operating in these states. Unfortunately, growth in Connecticut has been stalled. It's hard to convey the personal anguish that I experience when I see so many families in Connecticut yearning for an opportunity to have their children attend a high-performing school like the ones operated by Achievement First but cannot because of the significant barriers we face in opening new schools in Connecticut because of the existing charter school per pupil funding formula.

The academic performance of the students in our public charter schools has been nothing less than spectacular, helping to dispel many fallacies regarding the ability of urban school students to excel academically. An additional important, but sometimes overlooked consequence of the success of our public charter schools, has been the positive impact they've had on local host school districts. They have inspired local administrators and local school boards in many of our host districts to embrace many of Achievement First's proven methodologies, training protocols and assessment tools. The level of collaboration and cooperation between Achievement First and local host districts is unprecedented. Local districts are greatly benefiting from this collaboration. These collaborations are helping to transform the education landscape in Connecticut and will do much to enable us to close the widest academic achievement gap in the nation.

We urgently need more high-performing public charter schools in our state, like the ones operated by Achievement First. But without an increase in the charter school per pupil funding formula, of the magnitude proposed by the governor, I am afraid that opening more of these much needed schools will not be possible. We must not compromise the lives of our children. We must do all that we can to insure that we are delivering a high quality education to every child in our state. For, as you know, without that quality education they will have no chance at a better life. The need is enormous within our communities and I ask for your support of the governor's proposal. Thank you again for all of the wonderful work that you do.

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## Carl Highsmith Testimony for Monday 3/12

Good afternoon. My name is Carlton Highsmith. I am writing on behalf of Amistad Academy, and the many public charter schools across Connecticut in support of Senate Bill 1408, An Act Concerning Charter Schools.

Despite coming from humble beginnings, I now serve as the CEO of a successful, international company because of the great public schooling I had in my life. I know first-hand the life-changing impact that an excellent education can make, and that is why I am so passionate about finding ways to expand the educational opportunities of Connecticut kids—especially those from families trapped in cycles of poverty.

My journey as a supporter of Connecticut's public charter schools began several years ago when I first visited Achievement First's Amistad Academy in New Haven. I was frankly blown away by the dramatic results that this public school was achieving with its students and particularly impressed by the commitment of all of the adults in the school to ensuring every one of its students was on track for future success in college and the workplace. I was so moved by their hard work, vibrant academic culture and overriding commitment to success that I decided to join the school's Board of Directors in 2006.

Public charter schools like Amistad are changing the conversation about what is possible in our urban public schools. The driving principle behind their success is the same philosophy that I and most other business people have lived by in our work: give people the freedom to innovate and hold them accountable for getting results. "An Act Concerning Charter Schools" represents the next step in this compact between charter schools and the public.

As a Board member, I am very aware of the financial problems that Amistad currently faces. Connecticut's charter schools currently receive just \$8,000 per student, 30% percent less than the statewide average and 40% less than their district counterparts.

To make up this gap, we must raise \$4,000 in private funds for every student in Amistad. Combined with its sister school, Elm City College Prep, this means we must raise over \$3 million every year just to keep the doors to these public schools open. I am not sure how much longer we can continue to raise these funds and I am quite sure that without increasing charter school funding to the statewide average the Amistad model will not be able to continue to grow in our state.

Amistad Academy is well known for its motivational messages, including the slogan 'No Excuses.' At Amistad, there are No Excuses for missing school, for not doing your homework, or for being disrespectful. I believe that those of us who have the power to affect change are absolutely responsible for giving every child in our state equal opportunities for success – *No Excuses*. "An Act Concerning Charter Schools" is the right place to start in keeping this promise to our children.

Thank you for your time.

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:  
Carl Highsmith

Date:

3/12/07

Bill Number:

1408