Testimony of Gwen Petti
Common Ground High School Parent
161 Lawncrest Road, New Haven, CT 06515
Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee
February 20, 2013

Honorable Chairpersons, Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Gwen Petti. I am a New Haven resident and my son Dante is a sophomore at Common Ground High School. My son loves going to school every day which, as I'm sure we all know from our own high school experiences, is saying a lot! My own experience of Common Ground is that it's not just a school but a community. I have been able to sit down with each of Dante's teachers, his guidance counselor and the principle whenever I have anything that needs to be discussed and I always feel welcomed and supported in my efforts as the parent of a energetic teenager. I feel very fortunate that I've had the choice to be able to send Dante to this school where he feels so much at home. He has had incredible teachers who he considers to be not just teachers but mentors and has made many good friends. His interests have expanded and he continues to make excellent academic progress. I am very proud of him.

I am also, obviously, proud of Common Ground. I think it is a very unusual school in its commitment to developing the unique strengths of each student and meeting their individual needs. The incredible level of commitment that I see in the teachers and staff of Common Ground is something that needs more support not less. I know that I speak for many other parents of children who attend Common Ground when I recognize the high quality of the education that my child is receiving. The school's progress is evident not only in its test score gains but also in the number of children, 96%!, who are going on to continue their education beyond high school. These children are not merely "attending" high school but are thriving and growing in ways many of them would never have thought possible.

It is for all these reasons and many more that I strongly urge this committee to support Governor Malloy's budget proposal and give Common Ground, and all our successful public charter schools, the funds they need and deserve. Protecting the increase in the funding we were promised last year is vital to the continued success of schools like Common Ground. We simply cannot afford any further budget cuts. It remains a sad fact that despite the success of Common Ground and many other charter schools that Connecticut's public charters remain significantly underfunded in comparison to district public schools. And, as my son so aptly put it when I asked him about this issue today, "Aren't charter schools just as deserving as other schools?" and "That seems unfair - what's the difference?"

I thank all the members of this committee for their support in rectifying this imbalance and giving Connecticut's public charters the funding they so deserve.