Testimony
For: Appropriations Education Budget Public Hearing 2/21
Signed By: Kathleen Sullivan
Length: 2-3 minutes

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee on Appropriations, thank you for your time. My name is Kathleen Sullivan and I am a public school teacher in Bridgeport. I am pleased for the opportunity to testify in favor of Governor Dannel P. Malloy's budget proposal as it relates to education.

I am one of 27 individuals in Connecticut who recently submitted a proposal to build a new public charter school in Connecticut. And I believe my perspective on this subject is somewhat unique since I am a teacher at a traditional public school in Bridgeport.

Last year's law – which received overwhelming support from the General Assembly and Governor Malloy – made great strides for public education in Connecticut, helping to close our state's worst in the nation achievement gap. This includes much needed relief and growth for public charter schools.

This was great news for our state's children – particularly those in Bridgeport, which is one of the lowest performing school districts in the state – because there is high demand for charters, and most perform better than traditional public schools.

According to the State Department of Education, enrollment in charters would more than double if all wait-listed students were given a seat. Based on the department's School Performance Index, nearly 80 percent of charters outperform traditional public schools in their host districts.

This is in part why I have a dream of creating Bridgeport RISE, a public charter school in Bridgeport. As an accepted Fellow in the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship – the nationally renowned, highly selective, and intensive school design and leadership program – I will devote this coming year to the design and founding of Bridgeport RISE. The student body at Bridgeport RISE will reflect the demographics of the community, being open to all regardless of race or economic ability and, in particular, offering a robust program for English Language Learners. At Bridgeport RISE, there will be a relentless focus on academic achievement, so that the end goal – college – is realized for all students.

This is a dream I can only achieve if you make the funding for more charter schools available. This is a dream that will elude us if you choose not to fully invest in public charter schools in Connecticut.

I know this state is in dire straits. I know you have a difficult road ahead of you, as you attempt to weigh one social service against another. But I also know that without more

high-quality education options — schools based in community, founded on data — it is the children of Bridgeport who will suffer the consequences.

We cannot let that happen.

Thank you.