

Education Committee Hearing

February 15, 2013

Testimony provided by Reshma Singh, Achievement First

Chairpersons Fleischman and Stillman, and respected members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Reshma Singh, and I'm the vice president of external relations for Achievement First. Achievement First operates 10 public charter schools in the state of Connecticut, serving 3,000 students in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.

First and foremost, on behalf of our scholars, families and staff, I want to thank Governor Malloy, this committee and all the members of the State Legislature for taking crucial steps last year to bridge the funding gap between the State's public charter and district schools. The per-pupil funding increase we received last year allowed us to make critical investments in services for our students.

We hope the State Legislature will continue this progress to implement the commitments in the statute. First, we respectfully ask that you support the \$300-per-student funding increase Gov. Malloy proposed in his budget for 2014. The funding cuts we received during December's deficit mitigation plan forced us to make painful, real-time choices on academic services, much needed supplies and resources for teachers and students, elective class offerings and field trips. We are grateful to see a restoration of the first funding increase proposed in last year's law.

Next, we ask you move back to the original timeline outlined in the statute, which would fund charter schools at \$11,500 per student in 2015. We understand that Connecticut faces difficult financial choices, and our budget woes are unprecedented. But, the opportunity we have to enact meaningful change is also unprecedented. The education reform package that you and the Governor passed did more to create a fairer education system than any law previously enacted here in our state. Given this unprecedented challenge juxtaposed against this unprecedented opportunity, I urge you not to delay on fulfilling the promises made to our children last year.

At Achievement First, our scholars are armed with the best possible chance to succeed, and thousands are on the path to college. In 2012 state assessments, our schools significantly outperformed their host school district counterparts in 97 percent of grades and subjects tested. Our Bridgeport and Hartford academies are the highest performing non-magnet public school in those cities, and for the last two years, 100 percent of seniors at Achievement First Amistad High School have been accepted into four-year colleges and universities. Our charter schools are not only successfully boosting the academic performance of some of the State's

most underserved students but are highly sought after. Last year, Achievement First received more than six applications for each available seat.

In recognition of the fact that our schools are successfully helping some of Connecticut's most at-risk students, I urge you to continue the progress we've made in the past year and continue your good work towards a fairer education system for all public school children.

Thank you for your time and attention.