



Testimony, March 4, 2013 – Garland Walton

Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Garland Walton, and I have worked for Domus, a Stamford-based nonprofit, since 1999. That year, we opened our first school: The target population was high-need middle schoolers who faced many barriers to academic success and were on the path to dropping out of school.

Domus now operates three schools serving over 350 middle and high school students. Our expertise is working with traumatized youth who've been chronically exposed to adverse childhood experiences and have repeatedly failed to be successful in school. Many of those kids are similar to the student population of urban alternative programs; in fact, many have *been* in those programs. Each fall, we have kids who start with us at our high school and then leave a few weeks or months later, telling us they can attend a district alternative program in their city for only a few hours a day, and no one will hassle them. At our school, if you don't show up in the morning, we come to your home and rouse you from sleep. We make you wear a uniform and tuck your shirt in. We have high expectations of you, both academically and behaviorally. We push to you work hard and believe in yourself, and we do that relentlessly for seven hours each day.

These are kids who have been rejected and discarded for their entire lives and are reluctant to trust and be hurt yet again. They don't believe they have a future that involves something besides homelessness, jail, or an early and violent death. Why would a child with that outlook attend a rigorous full-day school, filled with adults who try to gain your trust and get involved in your life and your pain? If you give him the option of just doing his time where no one will pester him about his feelings, that's where he'll go. It's just less agonizing.

And so this child will be given a largely meaningless diploma, because he spent a few years doing 30 minutes each day of math, reading, social studies, and science with a teacher who's *also* been labeled "bad" and relegated to a less-than-desirable placement. And then that child will live in your community, unable to get or keep a job, and will be desperate to provide for himself and maybe eventually a family. And then he will be driven to do something dumb, and you'll pay for him to sit in prison.

Domus runs our full-day high school for around \$23,000 per student. It's expensive because these students come to us with massive academic deficits and suffering from the effects of deep trauma. But it's *still* cheaper than what other alternative programs spend per student for a far less comprehensive approach. We're proving you can provide an affordable and effective full-day program with needed social and emotional supports; money can no longer be an excuse. We should do better for these kids to save money now and in the future, and we should do it because it's just and fair: These students, like every other child, have the right to a quality education.

Thank you for your time.