Erika Haynes, Resident, Town of Windham
Written Testimony
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Monday, February 24, 2014

I would like to thank co-chairs Senator Bye and Representative Walker and the members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on Governor Malloy's education budget proposals. My name is Erika Haynes and I am a mother of four children, ages 4 to 19, and a former member of the Windham Town Council.

I am testifying in support of Governor Malloy's education budget proposals. The governor's budget includes funding for key measures of 2012's landmark education reform law, which received overwhelming support from the General Assembly.

More specifically, I would like to advocate for fully investing in three key measures of 2012's education reform law: early childhood education, the Commissioner's Network, and charter school funding.

The Governor has presented a budget that expands early childhood education to serve 4,000 more children by 2018. We know that an early start is a critical success factor for children. This is a social justice issue. Without that expansion, low-income children inevitably are left out, and can be behind their classmates from the first day of Kindergarten. We are better than that; Connecticut is better than that.

The Commissioner's Network was created as part of 2012's groundbreaking education reform law (Public Act 12-116), aiming to turnaround Connecticut's lowest-performing schools. I believe the direction and support that the Commissioner's Network provides can be a critical success factor in turning around a low-performing school. We cannot simply tell schools they are failing, but provide the support and resources to help them succeed. Providing funding for the Commissioner's Network is an essential component.

Finally, I would like to ask you to continue to provide the funding to increase quality public school options, specifically by providing funding for charter schools. I am a current applicant for a local charter school in the Town of Windham. One of the biggest concerns we hear about our proposal is that the state will not consistently provide the funds they commit to, and that charter schools could all come crashing down tomorrow. My first request is that you maintain the funding that has been committed to for charter schools previously. My second request is that you honor the governor's proposed appropriation for 3 new charter schools. According to the School Performance Index data fro the State Department of Education website, nearly 80% of Connecticut's public charter schools out-perform other schools in their home districts. This is also a social justice issue: according to the CT Mirror, charters are helping students who need it most, with more than 90% of existing and proposed charters located in the lowest performing districts in Connecticut. These children both deserve and need this.

All three of these measures will help thousands of students receive the high-quality education they deserve, realize a brighter future, and ensure a strong economic future for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration.