



March 17, 2014

State Senator Andrea Stillman  
State Representative Andrew Fleischmann  
Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Room 3100  
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Testimony in support of S.B. 476 “An Act Concerning the Achievement Gap”

Dear Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Ana María Rivera Forastieri and I am the Legal and Policy Analyst at Junta for Progressive Action, the oldest Latino community based non-profit organization in the City of New Haven. On behalf of our agency, and the 6,000 individuals and their families that we serve each year, we testify in support of S.B. 476, which would expand bilingual education from thirty months to sixty months. This change will ensure that students are transitioning to the mainstream English curriculum when they are prepared and not because they have exhausted the allotted months.

Junta has been serving the Latino community in New Haven for 45 years. We have sought to empower our communities through services, programs and advocacy as people transition to a new life in the United States. We have been very successful and have aided thousands of families that faced many barriers because of language, education, poverty and employment. We have achieved that while still recognizing the importance of nurturing and promoting cultural traditions, including language, as individuals learn the customs and traditions of this country. Language is part of one’s cultural identity; it defines who we are and how we fit in the global context. This is why we believe that it is a human right that should be fostered and preserved.

Beyond our recognition of this basic human right, we have witnessed the importance of developing cognitive and linguistic skills in a person’s own native language before he or she can transition to a program that is taught in English only. For example, we have offered English as a Second Language classes and GED classes at Junta for many years. A few years ago our Program Director for Adult Education recognized that some of the students in class lacked literacy skills in their own native language, which hindered their ability to learn English. We created a separate class to work on literacy development in Spanish because we understood that to be successful in the ESL and GED classes, students had to continue to develop literacy skills in their own language. The program proved successful and many students were able to transition and thrive in the English language courses.



We urge this Committee to support S.B. 476 and give bilingual students the chance of an equal education.

In solidarity,

Ana Maria Rivera Forastieri