

TESTIMONY BY BISHOP DEREK L. CALHOUN, FOUNDER AND SENIOR PASTER OF NEW  
VISION INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES TO THE CT APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEEE

MARCH 13, 2014

Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Bishop Derek Calhoun, and I am a faith leader in the Bridgeport community, serving as the founder and Senior Pastor of New Vision International Ministries.

There are few things more important to me and the community I represent than the safety of our children as they advance through school and get a quality education. In order for children to focus on their studies and reap the most benefit from being in class, they must feel safe and secure, and the school they attend must in fact be a safe and secure facility.

It is with this in mind that I would like to offer my support for the proposal to allow charter schools and technical schools access to school safety grants. Including charter schools in this proposal is particularly timely for members of the Bridgeport community, as we are currently the community of choice for two new charter school applications. If the children of Bridgeport will be attending these charter schools, then those schools deserve the same opportunities to fund safety related projects as other schools. I would like to note my thanks to Governor Malloy for recognizing that charter schools should be included in these programs.

The need for increased awareness about school safety and security catapulted to the headlines, and resulted in new investments by the state, after the tragedy at Sandy Hook, a horrible incident that left me reeling alongside the other citizens of Connecticut. However, I would like to point out that school safety has been an issue in my community of Bridgeport for many years. You may recall that school security guards were literally placed under the control of the police department in an effort to coordinate an effective way of running district safety. Let

me share with you a sobering statistic about the city: according to publicly available information compiled by the FBI, Bridgeport is ranked 51 out of the 100 most dangerous cities in terms of violent crime. While it is our hope that this violence will never enter our schools, we also recognize that we must take proactive steps to ensure schools stay safe. Offering grants for improvements to facilities for security purposes is a good step.

I remind the Committee of both the Sandy Hook tragedy and the situation in Bridgeport in an effort to reinforce the need for such grant programs. It is only when we all come together to address a problem that we have a chance of succeeding. All children deserve a safe school. It doesn't matter whether that school is a traditional district school or a public charter school. We have a responsibility to protect all our children.

I am encouraged that the Governor recognized this and proposed charter school inclusion in the grant. If the two pending charter schools are approved in Bridgeport, then by fall of 2014, 250 new students will be enrolled in charter schools here for the first time. At full capacity in five years a total of 1,265 students will attend these schools. We also know that this has the potential to impact the Bridgeport students enrolled at Side by Side Charter School. Last year 11 percent of the total student body was made up of Bridgeport residents.

As you can see, the proceeds of these new funds have the ability to dramatically and directly impact Bridgeport children. With all this in mind, I urge you to support the Governor's proposal. These safety grants are important. We need all children to feel secure and be secure so they can learn.

Thank you again for granting me the opportunity to speak today.