

**Appropriations Committee Hearing
Governor Malloy's Proposed Education Budget
Tuesday March 3, 2014**

FaithActs for Education
Rev. William McCullough, Board Chair
Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Executive Director

Good Evening Rep. Walker, Senator Bye, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

We are Rev. William McCullough, Pastor of Russell Temple CME Church in Bridgeport, CT and Founder and Board Chair of FaithActs for Education and Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Executive Director of FaithActs for Education. We are here to represent a group of pastors from Bridgeport that have come together to form this new organization and to testify on Governor Malloy's proposed Education Budget.

FaithActs for Education is a grassroots organizing nonprofit based in Bridgeport, CT. We exist to help faith leaders and their congregations step outside their place of worship to advocate for improved educational opportunities for the children of Bridgeport. Founded in October, 2014, FaithActs exists to leverage the power of faith leaders within their communities and directly engage and educate parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles and all community members who have a direct stake in a child's life and education.

Bridgeport is ground zero in the fight to improve education in Connecticut. We exist in a state with the largest income and achievement gaps in the country. So many families come here from other states and other countries for better opportunities, and it is our belief that we have failed many of them. Bridgeport is the lowest performing school district in the state. This is not a reflection of our children, nor is it a reflection of the adults who care for them or the adults who educate them. Rather this is a harsh reality that we must all take responsibility for and do our part to fix.

We do not envy the position the budget deficit has put you in this year, but we are here to remind you and assure you that the people of this great state elected each of you because we trust that you will make the right decisions, the best decisions you can possible make.

FaithActs believes that investments in education, investments in our children, the future of our states, are the greatest investments that we can make. For us, this proposed budget is bittersweet. First, we would like to applaud the Governor for keeping his promise on the opportunity that two new schools Capital Prep Harbor and Stamford Charter School for Excellence will provide for 1,250 children. We know this committee will have tough decisions to make about how to best appropriate these funds and we ask you to please protects these opportunities for our children.

While our organization believes school options and the right of every parent to choose the best school for their child, we are saddened that many choice conversations are often divisive and don't acknowledge that the vast majority of our children have and will rest in traditional public schools. Over 85% of Bridgeport students attend schools within district, 65% of them attend traditional public schools and over 10,000 of the roughly 20,000 students in district are currently being underserved. We must put all our efforts into making sure all children have great opportunities and educational success.

While flat funding to the \$2 billion Education Cost Sharing Grant might be a relief to some, and undoubtedly was a tough decision to make, it is undoubtedly a huge setback for a district that has been consistently underfunded. Although Bridgeport has a similar population and demographics to cities like Hartford, we received roughly \$21 million less, and spend about \$4,000 less per pupil. One could also argue that it takes more to educate children with socio-economic disadvantages, but we spend more than \$1,000 less per pupil compared to Connecticut's state average. Connecticut's lowest performing school district and arguable is poorest city, spends less on education than its more wealthy counterparts.

How do we expect the children of Bridgeport to have a fair shot in this city? How can we tell families that poverty isn't destiny and they can achieve the American Dream if we cannot even provide adequate funding for their child's education? What message are we sending to the families of Bridgeport who need the most help when we continually tell them to make due with less time and time again? With only 21% of Bridgeport public school students reading on grade level (regardless of race or class), how do we expect them to fulfill their God-given potential?

Again, we know you have very tough decisions to make this legislative session. Our only hope is that you can make the best decisions for our children. Many new promising things have been included in this new budget, but we can build all the new railroads and fix all the highways we want: if we do not improve education and make opportunities possible for all of our children, none of those aesthetic improvements will matter.

Please protect the funding for the two new schools and consider increasing funding for the Bridgeport Public School District. We look forward to working with you to improve all schools in Bridgeport and thank you for your time and leadership.