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Statement of Bruce Morris  
Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus  
State Representative for the 140th Assembly District  
For the Joint Committee on Children  
February 17, 2015  
In Support of:

**H.B. No. 5658, An Act Concerning Educational Surrogates, The Juvenile Justice System And Children Requiring Special Education.**

Good Afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and Honorable members of Committee on Children. As Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, I would like to express our strong support for **H.B. 5658, An Act Concerning Educational Surrogates, The Juvenile Justice System And Children Requiring Special Education.**

H.B. 5658 would ensure our youth(s) in Connecticut's juvenile system have equal access to educational opportunities by requiring an educational surrogate to all youths with special education needs involved in the juvenile justice system.

Under current law, educational surrogates or "surrogate parents" are specialists appointed by the state to all children who are identified as special educational students who are committed to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). These surrogates assist these adolescents with their special educational needs and are vital to their academic success.

Even though these surrogates are vital to the success of these youths, under current law, not all juveniles are entitled to a surrogate. Juveniles enrolled in Unified School District #2 or children who are involved in juvenile justice and committed to DCF, and are placed on either parole, in a residential or group home contracted by DCF or Court Support Services Division, lack the right to an educational surrogate. This is extremely concerning and is a disservice to these already disfranchised youths.

According to the National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, youths with special educational needs are at a higher risk for behavioral issues. In turn, youths with special educational needs are at a higher risk of being in the juvenile justice system. For this reason, such youths often have complex needs that can only be met by these surrogates.

Without these educational surrogates, dropout rates and an academic shortcoming become astronomical. To have a more mobile and equal society we need to have an educated population. Education is the universal equalizer that gives rise to equal opportunities. Without education the cycle of delinquency will continue and

these youth will be deprived of their opportunities for success. Let's help give all of our youth the necessities they need to find academic success. This will better our society and help make these youths productive adults.

Thank you Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and committee members for the opportunity to present testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rep. Bruce V. Morris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce V. Morris  
Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus  
State Representative  
140th District