

## Testimony to the Appropriations Committee

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**Chandler J. Howard**

President and CEO

Liberty Bank

315 Main Street

Middletown, CT 06457

### **In Support of the Parent Trust Fund and the Family/School Connection Program**

I am writing to respectfully ask you to restore the funding to the Parents' Trust Fund and the Family School Connection program that was eliminated in the Governor's budget.

As you know, the Parents' Trust Fund supports parent leadership and empowerment programs such as the nationally recognized Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parent SEE), and People Empowering People (PEP). These programs have a proven track record of success in educating and inspiring parents to become better advocates for their children and leaders within their communities. They are life-changing—not just for the parents, or their children, but for the greater community around them.

The relatively small investment that the state makes in the Parents' Trust Fund leverages private funding from a variety of sources. ***These include our Liberty Bank Foundation, which has provided \$176,500 in grants to PLTI and its sister programs over the past 15 years.*** Private philanthropy can and will supplement the Parent Trust Fund, but it simply does not have the capacity to fund these programs without state support.

Liberty's support for these parent engagement programs goes beyond our grant dollars. When the Parent Trust Fund was last defunded in 2009, many local PLTI, PEP, and Parent SEE programs shut down for lack of funding. When funding was restored in 2011, our foundation staff worked hand in hand with the Connecticut Commission on Children to restart these programs, and to propagate them in new communities. We are proud to have been involved with restarts in Middletown, Norwich, New London, and Willimantic, and with the launch of these programs in Wallingford, Mansfield, and West Hartford. We also provide support to ongoing programs in Meriden and Plainville. All this has required a significant investment in staff time for our foundation, but we regard the empowerment of parents as one of the best investments we can make in our communities.

To ensure that each of these programs continues to have centralized administration, training, and quality control, we have provided grants to the three agencies providing that provide this support: the Commission on Children (PLTI), the Connecticut Center for School Change (Parent SEE), and the University of Connecticut Extension Service (PEP).

Liberty has also supported the Family School Connection program in Norwich since 2010. This program provides home visiting to families of school age children who are struggling with behavioral or mental health issues, unstable housing, disability, or domestic violence. FSC supports parents in establishing family routines, connecting to community resources, scheduling and budgeting, positive parenting, and more. Children who have experienced FSC programming perform better in reading and math, need fewer referrals to outside services, and are absent and tardy less than before participating. This is truly the ounce of prevention that eliminates the need for a pound of cure later.

As a banker, I'm used to thinking about investments in terms of risks and returns. From a business point of view, investing in parents and children generates returns economically, as well as from a human standpoint. Children whose parents are engaged in their education earn better grades; have better school attendance; are more likely to graduate from high school and more likely to go on to higher education. That's important to the business community, because it means more young people will enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge that employers need. Those young people are vital to the success of our business sector and to the future of the state as a whole.

On the other hand, if we fail to invest in parents and children, we will pay in other ways. We'll pay for remediation programs for children who fall behind in school because they don't have the parental support they need to succeed. We'll pay criminal justice costs for children who get in trouble because they don't have the right kind of guidance from Mom and Dad. And we'll pay in terms of lost jobs when businesses leave our state because our labor force contains too many young people who are not ready to work.

The bottom line is that we can pay for parent leadership programs and the Family School Connection program, which we know are effective at building better lives for families—OR we can pay to repair the damage. The latter course will cost much more in both dollars and human suffering.

I know that our state is facing tough choices today. Cuts will have to be made. But let's make them where they will do the least damage to the most vulnerable among us—***and where the savings realized won't cost us more money elsewhere.*** Please make the right choice for Connecticut families: restore funding for the Parent Trust Fund and the Family School Connection, and keep these successful programs alive.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, and for your service to our state.



Chandler J. Howard  
President and CEO  
Liberty Bank