

Testimony of Carl Hardrick
Before the General Assembly Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015

Good evening Chairwoman Walker, Chairwoman Bye, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carl Hardrick and I am longtime community activist here in Hartford. I am also the proud grandfather of four scholars attending Achievement First (AF) public charter schools, two at Achievement First Summit and two at Achievement First Hartford Academy.

I am here to voice my support for these schools and the state funding needed to ensure that they can continue to grow. They have been life-changing for my grandkids, my family and my neighbors, and are wonderful high-quality public school options that are making a real difference in our community.

I can share many stories about my grandkids, but today, I'd like to share about my grandson Makhi. Seven years ago, Makhi was not getting a good education. He started kindergarten at a low-performing neighborhood school and he had 15 substitute teachers in that single year. As a result, he quickly fell behind and I saw him and his classmates lose an entire year of education. It just broke my heart and I said "no more." We decided to look for another school and entered the lottery for several high-performing magnet and public charter schools. Thankfully, Makhi won the lottery and got into an Achievement First school. I saw change right away, and since then Makhi's kept getting stronger and stronger as a student and as more confident as a young man.

However, both of these charters that my grandchildren are enrolled in – Achievement First Summit and Achievement First Hartford Academy – are still growing. Both schools are dependent upon the grade growth funds outlined in Governor's Malloy's proposed budget so that they can add a new grade next year. My two grandchildren at AF Summit literally won't be able to attend sixth grade at the school if charter school grade growth funds are not included in this year's budget. In addition, in fall 2016, the second year in the Governor's biennium budget, it is my hope that Makhi will move on to Achievement First Hartford High. The school serves grades 9th through 11th grades, and next year we hope it will expand to the 12th grade as well. But again, this is all budget-dependent.

I am worried their educations might get cut short. AF Summit Middle fifth-graders need to be able to go on to 6th grade and AF Hartford High 11th grade need to be able to move on to twelfth grade. The alternative is unconscionable. As a state, we need to support successful schools that are providing our kids with great educations and promising futures. That is exactly what Achievement First schools are doing in Hartford.

I also urge the General Assembly to make sure that public charter schools are funded at the same levels as other public schools in this state. My grandson and his classmates deserve to be funded just the same as any other public school students in the state. For far too long, high-poverty cities like Hartford and high-performing charter schools like Achievement First have gotten the short end of the funding stick, and that needs to end.

Please support Governor Malloy's budget allocation for charter school grade growth so that my grandkids can continue on their educational journeys, and please fix Connecticut's broken education funding formula so that all kids get their fair share. Thank you for your time.