

**Matthew Nittoly, Side by Side Charter School**  
**Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee**  
**March 3, 2015**

Greetings Co-Chairs Bye and Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

My name is Matthew Nittoly and I am the Executive Director of Side by Side Charter School in Norwalk. After opening in 1997, we've grown to serve more than 200 students from Pre-Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We're proud to provide Norwalk and surrounding communities with an option families overwhelmingly choose for their children.

Side by Side operates primarily through funding from the state, which provides charter schools \$11,000 per-pupil. Make no mistake, this is more than we've received in the past, and we're extremely grateful. With that said, \$11,000 is still far, far less than the average spent per-child in our state -- and we can't, nor should we need to, fundraise enough to make up that gap. Our time, money, and energy does, and should go toward educating our students -- not chasing donors.

That funding disparity leaves us with far fewer resources to provide educational tools for our kids, a diminished capacity to hire teachers and support staff, and larger obstacles to bridge when we try to provide our students with innovative, hands on experiences.

Most of all, because of way charters are funded - through a per-pupil grant that's separate from the education cost sharing formula - we're left uncertain and extraordinarily vulnerable every time the state creates or amends a budget.

For example, when the state unexpectedly cut the charter per-pupil from \$10,500 to \$10,200 in December 2013, we had to make major changes, including reconfiguring our assignments for our teaching staff. As a small independent charter school LEA, a cut of over \$70K is equal to more than the average salary for a full time teacher. When you consider that we are a district with only 11 classroom teachers, this is a major obstacle to overcome. We don't have room in our budget to find a spare FTE lying around. Every dollar counts.

Make no mistake, these circumstances are due to a fundamentally broken funding formula that treats students at Side by Side and every other charter in the state as though they're less worthy of public support than the child in a district school down the street. \$300 less per-child slowed us for half a year, but we made due. I imagine what we could achieve with \$300 more per-child, not to mention the thousands of dollars more our district peers have to work with.

It's clear that you need to make hard choices this year – we understand that. As someone who's intimately familiar with hard choices, I'm telling you: continuing to flat-fund charter schools is fundamentally unfair.

Please, support us and find room in this budget to bring our finances more in line with other public schools in the state. It will make a world of difference to the students at Side by Side and other public charter schools across Connecticut. Thank you.



Matthew Nittoly

*Executive Director, Side by Side Charter School*