

GWEN SAMUEL, CONNECTICUT PARENTS UNION
GENERAL ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE TESTIMONY REGARDING
SENATE BILL 1096
MARCH 19, 2015

Good afternoon, Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg, and education committee members. My name is Gwen Samuel. I'm a public school parent and president and founder of the Connecticut Parents Union.

I am here today to express my opposition to Senate Bill 1096 and its proposed two-year moratorium on quality charter schools.

This moratorium hurts families that are already unfairly marginalized in our society. A disproportionate number of people of color and the poor are disenfranchised by lower quality schools, limited access to livable wage jobs and, until recently, basic health care.

When charter school options became available to parents and children in Connecticut, the seats were filled immediately, especially within urban communities because they offered another option to ensure academic success. Every day, groups like the Connecticut Parents Union urges community members to engage in the civic process like voting, even when they feel lawmakers don't care about certain zip codes.

This law is a clear example of why communities that NEED to vote, but don't, lose hope in democracy when equity prevails only for a select few.

My prayer is that you move beyond the politics of education and stand up with the children and families who need you the most. Stay the course on improving education outcomes for Connecticut's children. In a democracy, parents of color expect *our* elected leaders to listen and work on our behalf, as well, to make things better for all, not just a select few.

This bill is a perfect example of the sort of injustice we see every day in our nation. There is no excuse for halting *quality* charters in the state of Connecticut, which are part of the solution to giving all children equitable access to opportunity. The bill denies poor families the opportunity to seek a better future for their kids, and that is absolutely unacceptable and morally wrong.

It's disheartening because throughout our "agree to disagree" moments, we've made some progress in education in recent years. Members of this committee, along with the Black and Latino Caucus, Governor Malloy, and so many others have worked hard to give all of Connecticut's children access to the educational opportunities that increase their chances for success, in both academics and in life.

I want to know what happened. Where is our resolve to let all Connecticut communities know that all of their children matter?

These efforts, efforts you've been a part of, have given more parents hope via choice when it comes to their children's education. And when parents have a choice, it gives their kids a better chance in life.

Two things are clear about education in Connecticut right now and we must *truthfully* acknowledge those things in order to move forward with fidelity. First, we aren't doing right by our students of color and low-income families. Second, effective charter schools are clearly part of the solution in improving education within Connecticut. They have a proven track record of improving outcomes for children of color and low-income families. As with anything, there is always room for improvement.

But right now, thousands of children are waiting for access to quality schools, which include charters. Do those students and their families not deserve to attend a school of their choice?

Will you, our state leaders, hear the pleas of all parents, especially low-income parents and parents of color? Will you have the moral courage to make the politically tough decisions that are in the best interests of all children?

It should go without saying: our children are the true foundation of our future. They are our future community leaders and our future workforce. If we can find billions to invest in roads and bridges, we can surely support quality charter schools, along with our traditional schools, so that parents have access to educational opportunities that ensure the academic and future success of their children.

At the very least, we should not silence voices that demand new options for parents and students alike, especially vulnerable populations. The proposed moratorium retreats from embracing positive change to "only those with the most resources" will have access to opportunity.

This moratorium is bad for parents and children who are most in need of a fair chance at an improved quality of life. Additionally, this moratorium is bad for the state because our future workforce comes from quality schools. Parents of color and the poor should not have to fight so hard to gain access to quality schools and resources. Please pay heed to parent and student voices, and ensure there is a path for quality charter schools to open in communities that demand and need them.

Thank you.