



**Testimony in Support of  
S.B. No. 318, 'An Act Concerning Private School Transportation'  
Before the Education Committee**

March 2, 2016

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

Our names are Principal Kelly O'Leary and President Allison Rivera of St. Martin de Porres Academy, a private, independent, Catholic, inner-city middle school for economically disadvantaged students located in New Haven, Connecticut. The mission of St. Martin de Porres Academy is to transform lives through education and opportunity. We are writing in support of the bill S.B. No. 318, concerning inter-district transportation bill for K-8 nonpublic schools.

The Connecticut Supreme Court has already explained at length the purpose of bus transportation for non-public students: to support the safety and wellbeing of students. The Connecticut Supreme Court was very clear that bus transportation did not support the individual private schools, but rather only supported Connecticut's citizens (Russo, 2002). The Connecticut Supreme Court has already ruled twice that bus transportation programs must include private school students because they are a benefit for the students and their parent(s)/guardian(s) (Conn 1998; Russo, 2002).

The Bill S.B. No. 318, concerning inter-district transportation bill for k-8 nonpublic schools, does not change this reality. Inter-district busing continues to support Connecticut residents' health and wellbeing in the same manner the Connecticut Supreme Court described. Additionally, bussing for private school students currently does not come out of the Education Fund impacting public education and neither would inter-district bussing. This is not a matter of weakening public education or taking from one group of students and families and giving to another. S.B. No. 318 is about supporting ALL Connecticut families with children who attend school. There are currently over 67,000 students in the State of Connecticut who attend private and Catholic schools (CAIS, 2015). Multiplying 67,000 students by the average cost-per-pupil in Connecticut's public schools (\$16,631.00 per pupil in 2013) generates an ANNUAL savings to Connecticut taxpayers of over a billion dollars. Private and Catholic schools are good for public education and taxpayers. The vote in the matter of S.B. No. 318 appears to be clear; specifically in light of the support given to a select group of Connecticut students and families who are bused across town lines for some district schools like CREC.

Lastly, we would not be doing our jobs if we did not advocate for our own students and families. Not all private and Catholic schools serve the wealthy. As is the case at our school, all of our students and families fall below the poverty line. If our families live outside of New Haven, but still want a better education for their child, many take public transportation to and from school with their child. Our school day is ten hours: beginning at 7:15am and ending at 5:15pm. Our parents who live in West Haven are committed to breaking the cycle poverty for their children. Inter-district busing is so desperately needed for THESE families whose only barrier to this busing right is that they live in an apartment within a four mile radius of our school over the West Haven town line and therefore are ineligible for bussing. We know that our families would wish to receive the same support given to them as the CREC families have received.

We ask that you vote to support, and later enact, S.B. No. 318 to allow inter-district transportation for all K-8 non-public school students. Bussing supports Connecticut Citizens, OUR parents and students, in the inner city. We urge you to support S.B. No. 318; it will have an immediate impact on the health, safety, and wellbeing of Connecticut's parents and students.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kelly O'Leary".

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Allison Rivera".

Allison Rivera, President  
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