

**Testimony of Danielle Craig, Parent, Bridgeport Public Schools
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016**

Good evening Chairwoman Walker, Chairwoman Bye and respected members of the General Assembly Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about Governor Malloy's proposed budget and how it impacts me and my son.

My name is Danielle Craig, and I'm a Bridgeport parent. My son Devin attends ABCD's pre-Kindergarten program, which I selected because it was the most affordable for me at the time.

My son is still in daycare, but I have been disappointed with his learning experience. The children in his class are simply being babysat, and are not being taught important concepts that I believe they're already able to comprehend.

I know that my son's caregivers care deeply for him and do their best to look after him. I've witnessed this firsthand -- when Devin developed an intense pain in his legs that the doctors couldn't identify and we couldn't do anything about, I saw them shed actual tears.

However, my primary concern is that Devin is not learning at the level he's supposed to. Staffing is always scarce at his school, and he's shifted from room to room several times in a week. If he wasn't enrolled in the Birth to Three program, which aids children with special needs, he would already be falling behind.

My son is friendly, helpful, and artistic. Devin's teachers never limit his artistic expression, but I'm not sure they help cultivate his social skills. As an only child, the classroom is the best place for Devin to develop these skills.

I want Devin to remain true to himself, and to value himself as a black man in a society. Finding yourself is a tumultuous process, and it's even more difficult without a solid educational foundation.

Every child is a potential college graduate. I went to a great private high school in Connecticut on scholarship, but it still didn't prepare me for college, and college didn't prepare me for real life. Great schools are schools that prepare our children for what lies ahead.

Every child in Connecticut should have chance to attend a prestigious college, like our navy Ivy League school Yale, and to begin an exciting career. For this vision to become a

reality, our sons and daughters need to be able to obtain as much knowledge and education as they possibly can.

I'm here today because I am worried there will not be a seat for my son in one of the high quality Bridgeport schools that exist now. There are too many kids waiting for access to these charter schools. Some of these students have been waiting for years and they will just keep waiting.

In the meantime, they are going to schools that are not setting them up for success. We need to do more to encourage good public charter schools to educate Connecticut children. Unfortunately, due to an unfair funding system that gives public charters \$4,000 less per student per year, it's hard for public charter schools to serve more and more students. That's unfair to parents, it's unfair to students, and it has to change.

Connecticut needs to ensure that all public school children across the state receive the education funding they deserve, regardless of the type of school they attend. Our children need better access to great schools, including public charter schools.

Thank you.