

**Testimony of Chris James, Parent, Bridge Academy & Capital Harbor Prep
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016**

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Chris James. I'm the proud father of two children and I live in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

I grew up in Bridgeport, and attended Bridgeport's public schools. My children attend public schools in Bridgeport. My daughter Elisa attends Bridge Academy and my son Brandon attends Capital Prep Harbor School. They entered into the lottery for these schools in order to win a chance at a brighter future.

My children are the reason I'm here today. Because all across Connecticut, schools that serve children well are chronically underfunded, schools like Bridge Academy and Capital Prep. On average, public charter school students get \$4,000 less than traditional public school students. This is personal for me - my children deserve the same funding as any other child in Connecticut.

My daughter Elisa has always been a leader and challenges anyone who challenges her. You may remember her testimony from earlier tonight - she came here tonight to remind all of you what is at stake. She believes in the need to challenge the status quo - she believes that all public school children should be funded equitably, regardless of race, class or zipcode.

My greatest fear is that my son Brandon will be treated like a statistic. Before attending middle school at Bridge Academy he was passed through the system without the extra support he deserved. Now that he is in high school where he has access to the tools and programs he needs to pass. Before his experience in these two public charter schools he was treated like many in Bridgeport. Now he is doing incredibly well.

But Brandon's school has limited access to the resources he deserves. Unless we fight to ensure public charter schools have access to state education dollars, Brandon will only get the bare minimum, and never become ready for college and work.

Every day I wonder if Bridgeport's children are being afforded the best possible public education. It is no secret that our public education system is broken. It is our responsibility as adults to ensure all children in our community have what they need.

I'm here today to ask you to support Elisa and Brandon and all the Brandons in Bridgeport. Thank you for the opportunity to address you tonight. I had to work hard to be here today but then again, I always work hard to fight for my children. Until Connecticut closes the unfair funding gap, we'll continue to come here to fight.

Thank you.