Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Thursday, March 6th, 2019
Don Thompson

Good evening. My name is Don Thompson and I am the President of StayWell Health Center in Waterbury. We provide medical, dental, behavioral health, and substance abuse services to 24,000 patients living in the Greater Waterbury Area. I am also a member of the board of directors at Brass City Charter School. I want to begin by thanking the members of the committee for the opportunity to present my testimony.

I am here because I feel a sense of responsibility to lend my voice to the children in my community who are relegated to a separate and unequal public education system. The Brass City Charter School is housed in the former St. Margaret’s parish. Two of my children attended the school and we were parishioners. I have lived on the same street as the Brass City Charter School for 34 years. It is heartening to see the old parish property transformed into a campus of learning, serving a population in need.

First and foremost, I want to say that all public schools in my community need and deserve more resources and support. But there are schools in my community that are demonstrating that our kids can achieve at the highest of levels. Schools like Brass City Charter School, who every day break down stereotypes that place limits on our kids’ futures. Our school predominantly serves students of color. 47% of the school’s population are Hispanic or Latino additionally, 34% of our students are Black or African American and 70% are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch.

I can’t describe the pride I feel when I witness our kids not just achieving academically but building the confidence in themselves that will prepare them to become successful adults and thriving members of the Waterbury community. Students at Brass City Charter School are 2.5 times more likely than their district peers to be at grade level in English Language Arts and 3.5 times likelier to be at grade level in math. Additionally, students at Brass City Charter School are 73% less likely to become chronically absent.

As someone who is deeply invested in my community, I am highly disappointed that schools like Brass City Charter School, which are providing a high quality education to students, are among the lowest funded public schools in the state. So I am asking you for the following:

- First, raise the foundation amount of per-pupil funding for students in public charter schools to $11,525. This is the amount established by the legislature as the estimated cost
of educating a general education student who does not have any additional learning needs.

- And second, we need to apply the low income, concentrated poverty and ELL weights included in the ECS formula to all public school students who meet these criteria including those in public charter schools.

I truly hope that you will demonstrate the courage and leadership necessary to address this issue of inequality in our current education funding system. Children and families need to be kept at the center of policy changes and schools, like Brass City Charter School, that are consistently showing strong results for our children need to be funded fairly. Thank you for your time tonight, and for your consideration.