Good evening Chairwoman Walker, Chairwoman Osten, Ranking Member Lavielle, Ranking Member Formica and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Francis Nunez. I am a resident of Bridgeport, Connecticut and a constituent of Sen. Dennis Bradley and Rep. Ezequiel Santiago, both members of this committee. I am also Community Organizer with FaithActs for Education. I am here to support House Bill 7148 and ask you to take it a step further.

Living, learning, and organizing in Bridgeport for the past 9 years has made me embody some of the qualities of Bridgeport residents: among these qualities is resilience and pride. Community Organizing is a tough job no matter where its done. Just ask Barack Obama. But, organizing for education equity in Bridgeport takes a different kind of zeal.

Most education equity issues in Bridgeport have been around for so long, even local elected officials have no desire to change the status quo because its all they’ve ever known so it “must be normal”. Most elected officials at the state level feel the same way about these outdated and unjust education funding formulas. We’ve become so numb to the pain that we can’t even tell that we’re hurting ourselves. The truth is so hard to bare that we actually have had to convince ourselves that our state is doing all that it can for its most vulnerable children.

Despite this, motivating myself and others to fight for more funding and better schools isn’t impossible thanks to those two qualities we possess: resilience and pride. These qualities propel FaithActs members to fight and win.

As people of faith, we do this despite our hardships and we believe all things are possible. There are members who have been crippled by their poor educational options for generations in their families. Our member Brittani Cogdell was born and raised in Bridgeport and lives in Bridgeport with her daughter. She and her mother are graduates of the Bridgeport public school system, and now she works multiple jobs to afford to send her daughter to a private school outside of the city. Our member Alfreda Stewart, who read testimony for this committee last year, raised her daughter and is raising her granddaughters in the system, all of whom have special needs. She has been fighting for basic services for over 20 years. Kelsa Smith helps buy supplies for her students as a special needs para. She remembers her teacher buying supplies for her as well.

The proposed biennial budget would add $2,320,455 more dollars towards Bridgeport education for 2020 and $4,863,720 more for 2021. This definitely motivates our efforts. It's a step in the right direction, but you and I both know it's not enough and it's still not equitable. Not for a system that's been underfunded going on 60 years. If we were funded like our neighboring cities are currently, we’d be receiving millions more.

And these aren’t just figures for me. This is my life. I look at my stepson, who is almost 3 and is getting ready to enter the Bridgeport school system, and I’m terrified for him. But I’m even more terrified for his
future classmates, whose parents don’t have access to additional resources or are even aware of how badly, how criminally, our children are being robbed of their futures right in the classroom.

I hope this committee can propose a budget that truly reflects a future of equitable education for Bridgeport children – a radical, but necessary increase of funds that can break generational cycles of poverty. I urge you to make it happen, and I am ready to keep fighting for this in the name of my city, past, present, and future. Resilience is in our nature, after all. It’s up to you to decide if you want to be able to look my stepson in the eyes 20 years from now and tell him you did everything in your power to protect his future.

Thank you for your time.