Good evening, honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Carol D. Birks. I am the proud Superintendent of 21,208 students who attend New Haven Public Schools. Our District has 41 schools, including 16 inter-district magnet schools. The District is comprised of students from an economically, culturally, racially and linguistically diverse population whose demographic make-up is 47 percent Latino, 37 percent African American, 13 percent White, and 3 percent who identify as other. Our schools provide a rich variety of opportunities where students can choose from a highly successful, nationally recognized high school for engineering and science to a critically acclaimed high school for visual and performing arts and many other themed programs. Students from across the region, including 18 sending districts, choose New Haven Public Schools each year because of its academic excellence and pathways that are one of a kind.

With support from the State, New Haven Public Schools has benefited from funding to expand its College and Career Readiness pathways that engage students early in specialized fields, to provide students with social/emotional learning, and to improve teaching and learning districtwide. We are grateful that in past years through State appropriated funding the District has improved its offerings and instruction, and as a result, has seen steady rise in the four-year graduation rate from 71.4 percent to 80 percent over five years. These accomplishments have
occurred during a time of nominal increases in Education Cost Sharing (ECS), Alliance and Magnet School grants.

While we are aware that the Governor and Legislature will provide incremental increases for ECS over the next few years, we are concerned that the increases are being outpaced by increased costs and student needs. In Governor Lamont’s proposed budget for 2020, New Haven Public Schools will receive a decrease in base ECS funding of $272,323 and an increase in Alliance funding of $2,677,134, for a net increase of $2,404,811. The proposed budget also cuts funding for Adult Education by $19,914 and the Teacher’s Retirement Contribution by $183,768. In all, New Haven Public Schools will receive an additional $2,201,129. This number is only 8.7 percent of the $30,682,723 shortfall the district faces in order to provide the same level of services, with the same staffing and contracted services, that it has in the current year.

For that reason, we urge the Appropriations Committee to consider a 5 percent increase in funding to Magnet Schools as prescribed by HB-7109, that will ensure that New Haven Public Schools inter-district programs will continue to thrive and improve outcomes for all students. We urge the Appropriations Committee to augment the weighted funding in ESC for students with disabilities, English Learners and students living in poverty. We are especially concerned that budget constraints continue to make it difficult for districts such as New Haven to provide an equitable education for all students and to meet compliance requirements for students with disabilities and English Learners. Over the past three years, New Haven Public Schools enrollment has increased from 12 percent to 15 percent for students with disabilities and from 14 percent and 17 percent for English Learners.
Finally, I want to draw your attention to an important trend in our demographics. Over the last five years, the District’s magnet schools have seen an increase in enrollment by African American and Latino students from neighboring towns. Students and families of color are attracted to the multitude of offerings that they do not have in their sending district and to the culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy used by our teachers. Enrollment by out-of-district African American and Latino students has increased from 60 percent to 65.8 percent in the last three years. We know this is a result of our improved programs and offerings, but we also know that African American and Latino students from out-of-district contribute to the overall racial compliance targets and that the district loses magnet money when the overall make-up of African American and Latino students surpasses 75 percent.

We believe that the State should take multiple factors into consideration, including students’ income levels, when calculating magnet targets and eligibility for funding for New Haven. This is especially important in a year when the overall proposed funding for Magnet Schools is reduced by $28.2 million dollars. This might mean that districts like New Haven, outside the Shef region, will be sharing fewer dollars for magnet schools. We urge the Appropriations Committee to increase Magnet Funding by 5 percent for all magnet districts.

New Haven Public Schools revenues come from a multitude of sources, but it relies most heavily on ECS, Alliance and Magnet School grants to maintain and expand successful programs. We urge you to protect the funding in these three areas and to find ways to provide increases that assist districts in meeting huge shortfalls in programming. The students in New Haven and the students throughout Connecticut deserve us to invest in programs that allow them
to fulfil their dreams and achieve at the highest levels. We know that every new dollar in New Haven will result in better outcomes for students.

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