Testimony to Appropriations

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Rep. Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Regan Allan and I am the Coordinator for the Stamford Public Education Foundation’s Parent Leadership Programming and a proud Parent Leadership Training Institute graduate, Class of 2000. I am concerned that the Parent Trust Fund, within the State Department of Education, is to be eliminated in Governor Lamont’s budget proposal. We have received money off and on for 22 years from this fund. The money we receive funds 75% of our parent leadership programming, including the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), UConn People Empowering People (PEP) and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (PSEE) in Stamford. With this elimination, we will be unable to hold any of those programs in 2019-2020. In the past 22 years, we have graduated 574 parent leaders through our PLTI, PEP and Parents SEE programs in Stamford and we want future leaders to have to same opportunity.

Our graduates have successfully run for Stamford Board of Education and Board of Representatives seats, as well as served on various organizations and civic initiatives ranging from the Stamford Public Education Foundation, the United Way, the Mayor’s Multicultural Council, the School Readiness Council, the Hispanic Advisory Council, Person-to-Person, the Stamford Junior Women’s Club, the Haitian Community Center, the Jewish Historical Society, the Stamford Youth Foundation, Stamford Hospital Task Forces, the NAACP, the Parent Teacher Council, the Housing Commission and more. In addition, the PLTI Alumni Association has coordinated several events such as Stone Soup, Community Conversations, and most recently our Mind, Body and Heart events this past fall to support the Stamford Public Schools new mission statement.

As part of PLTI, participants are required to complete a written proposal for a community project which benefits the lives of children in the community. Since we started, there have been 292 proposals, some of which were implemented and have made a great impact on the Stamford community. Perhaps, our biggest accomplishment would be considered the establishment of an Office of Family and Community Engagement in the Stamford Public Schools and Parent Facilitators being placed in every school.

As part of the PEP program, participants are expected to complete at least one group project after graduation. Most classes complete 3-4 projects. The two most recent classes which graduated in December 2018 are working on several projects, including:

- A mentoring program for at-risk Latino middle school students
- A workshop in Spanish on how to read to preschool children
- A workshop for parents of adolescents, “Nuevo Horizonte: Diagnóstico and Red flags”
- A school clean up: “The Stars: Keeping Cur School Clean”

Last year, we were unable to hold PLTI because of the budget delay. This year, we are holding PLTI, but it costs about 46K to run. We did not receive enough funds to hold PSEE this year. I was told by SERC that 22 CT towns/cities applied for funding through the Parent Trust Fund this year, but only 10 were awarded funds. Here is how the Fund has decreased in the last few years:

Year 13-14: $500,000
Year 14-15: $475,000
Year 15-16: $422,813 ($45,937 budget cut)
Year 16-17: $439,823.00, then there was a cut on 7/1 which brought it to $426,629.00
Year 17-18: $267,193.00

This decrease shows me that our legislators do not see the value in parent leadership. In its heyday, the Parent Trust Fund funded PLTI programs in 17 towns. This year, only 4 towns/cities are holding PLTI. CT used to lead the way with our PLTI programs and now we are one of the states that has the least number of sites holding PLTI. In the long run, graduates of our programs can save money for CT and local towns; they go on to volunteer to provide services for parents. A graduate last year held a workshop for parents of children with special needs, saving our school district money. Another graduate devised a credit card system for PTO payments, which saved hundreds of dollars for local PTOs. There are many examples of ways graduates have saved money, but most importantly our graduates have improved the lives of thousands of children in Stamford, CT, the U.S. and around the world. One graduate currently leads in the effort nationally with her Pediatric Gun Safety Project; she advocates to have pediatricians include gun safety in well visits. Locally, one graduate volunteers to teach classroom teachers about data science. There are many more examples of parent leader successes in Stamford and all over CT.

Personally, the program taught me how to advocate for not only my four own children, but all children in Stamford. I was one of a small minority of parents who helped eliminate tracking in Stamford. When my child’s school was going to be closed, I developed a petition signed by 500+ residents in Stamford. I have served as PTO president at every one of my child’s schools and served as president of the district PT Council. I started the district-wide Odyssey of the Mind program in Stamford. I coordinated a citywide chess program. I founded the first MOMS Club chapter in Fairfield County to support stay-at-home moms in 1999. I volunteered with Junior Achievement. I coordinated Stone Soup and several district and school-based Community Conversations. My list of accomplishments could go on and on and for all of these examples, I volunteered. Our city saved a lot of money with me!

I ask you to restore funding to this program which changed me from a parent who cares to a parent who leads.

Respectfully,