Re: Testimony in Support of Increased Funding for Public Education

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am a parent of two children, ages 4 and 7, at Columbus Family Academy in the New Haven Public Schools and write to offer my strongest possible support for significantly increased funding for public education.

I am a longtime resident of New Haven, graduate of Yale University, and editor at Yale University Press. My children's school is a neighborhood PK-8 school located in New Haven’s landed-immigrant neighborhood, Fair Haven. Our student body is primarily Hispanic, with a large number of English language learners and lower-income families. We chose this school for our family because it is our neighborhood school, we believe in public education, and we embrace its dual language Spanish-English curriculum, which aims to graduate all students fluent in English and Spanish.

Yet in our school and others, particularly in urban areas, across the state, there is an ongoing loss of services for children: cuts to guidance, library, field trips, and planned cuts affecting class size. The chronic underfunding of public education in our state hurts not just kids, but all CT residents: it perpetuates the jobs crisis and increases shared long-term costs, from social services to prisons. Last year, CT surrendered $202 million revenue to corporate tax abatement, $5 million to direct subsidies, and is about to surrender $230 million estate tax revenue. There is money for our priorities. If we want to stop the cycle of poverty, we can make real progress if our kids are our top priority and we fully fund their public schools.

The CCJEF case throws responsibility for adequate school funding onto the legislature. Dissappointingly, Lamont’s budget decreases ECS slightly and increases Alliance--yet Alliance funds can’t be used to ensure that day-to-day classroom needs are met. The ECS formula, moreover, has no meaningful research basis, such as a cost study to assess the actual cost of adequately educating children with special needs, learning English, living in poverty, and experiencing trauma. And even the essentially arbitrary ECS numbers are routinely funded at less than 100%, painfully shortchanging our kids year after year after year.

New Haven’s tax base can’t take much more, particularly given all the taxable property lost to Yale (and partial funding of PILOT). **We therefore ask for a meaningful increase in funding levels of at least $10 million to New Haven**, so that our district can begin to finally, adequately meet the real needs of our neediest children--for them, for their families, and for all of us in the community that we share.

Sarah Miller
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