REP. VARGAS (6TH): I'm here by calling the Public Hearing into order. Will the Clerk please read the safety instructions?

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask you to note the location of an access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors, through which you entered the room, are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from the Capital police. Do not delay and do not return unless you are advised that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room and stay away from the exit doors until an all clear announcement is heard.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Madam Clerk. First of all, I'd like to apologize for the lack of more Committee members here at the public hearing today, but they're all busy either in Appropriations, Finance, or some of the other Committees that are trying to work on the budget issues. And they'll --
but they all received the bios of the nominees and they will have an opportunity to vote, because we keep the votes open customarily until 4:00 p.m. And as probably you know, this is -- this Committee, the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee makes a recommendation to the legislative body as a whole. And that'll be probably taken up for the nominees today, will probably be taken up perhaps as early as tomorrow or Thursday.

We have already informed all the members of who's coming before us today, and you may see some of our Committee members come in and out of the room as the morning progresses. And the way we usually operate this Committee is, we have our public hearing first, we allow all the nominees to make a brief presentation. We swear them in, they make a brief presentation, then they answer any questions Committee members may have. At the conclusion of all the nominees making their presentations, we open up the meeting for any member of the public that would like to comment. We usually limit that to 30 minutes unless there's follow up questions. And we read any written communication we may have gotten, either pro or against a nominee into the record. And at the conclusion of the public hearing, we proceed to -- to our business meeting where we take a vote on the nominees.

And it -- from the looks of it today, the vote probably won't be finished until 4:00 p.m. So, the Clerk will keep the votes open. And we'll just, instead of adjourning the meeting, we'll just continue the meeting until 4:00 o'clock, recess until 4:00 o'clock, and then adjourn at the conclusion of the voting.
Our first order of business for today is a Joint Resolution, Joint Senate Resolution confirming Marissa Paslick Gillett as an -- as a Utility Commissioner for the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority. Will you please come forward? And before you take your seat, would you please raise your right hand and promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MARISSA PASLICK GILLETT: I will.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please take a seat. And as is customary, this is an opportunity for you to make your introductory remarks. The floor is yours.

MARISSA PASLICK GILLETT: Committee, thank you. My name is Marissa Gillett and it is an honor and privilege to be nominated to be a Commissioner of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority or PURA by Governor Lamont. My sincere thanks to this Committee for the opportunity to appear before you to speak to my desire to serve on PURA.

As you may know, my family and I are new to Connecticut, having recently settled in West Hartford with my two and a half year old twins. It's been a pleasure acquainting ourselves with the many family friendly activities in the area and my husband and I are really looking forward to raising our children in this community.

Although I am a new resident to Connecticut, I'm not unfamiliar with the state's energy landscape, having had the great opportunity to collaborate with Connecticut Energy Policy leaders throughout my career. Between 2011 and 2018, during my tenure at the Maryland Public Service Commission, it was my privilege to work alongside of Connecticut regulators and environmental leaders as we
collaborated on two separate program reviews for the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative or RGGI, which is the first market-based program in the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

I also collaborated extensively with Connecticut representatives and other staff throughout New England on comments to the US EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan.

In addition to the regional work I supported in my position at the Maryland Public Service Commission, I focused heavily on initiatives aimed at modernizing the State's electric grid while balancing the need to provide affordable and clean energy to the residents -- residential, commercial, and industrial rate payers.

A few examples of my leadership in Maryland are reflected by the 2017 offshore wind decision, the 2018 statewide electric vehicle proposal, and the 2015 statewide energy efficiency legislation. Immediately preceding my nomination by Governor Lamont, I was serving as the Vice President of External Relations for the Energy Storage Association, which is the National Trade Association representing energy storage. Energy storage technologies have been referred to as the bacon of the electric grid, and that storage makes everything better.

I look forward to applying the skill set I learned in that role to unpackaging a regulatory framework that can support innovative and emerging technologies aimed at creating a more affordable, reliable, and resilient infrastructure base.

In sum, I believe that I have developed the policy experience and demonstrated the work ethic necessary
to serve as a PURA Commissioner. I would like to thank each of the Committee members and Representative Vargas for the courtesy you have extended to me today. And I welcome any questions that you may have for me about my background and qualifications to serve in this role.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for the statement. First of all, on behalf of myself and the Committee members, some of which may be watching this through closed-circuit TV or on their devices, I'd like to congratulate you on your appointment by Governor Lamont. We've had an opportunity to meet and discuss some of the issues, so I feel quite confident that you'll do a great job as one of our Commissioners of public utilities.

As you know, Connecticut has faced a challenge with the cost of energy in this state and it's been difficult and we try to do regulation. There's been competition, but it still seems like Connecticut is is lagging behind in terms of being able to reduce energy costs. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MARISSA PASLICK GILLETT: Yes, sir. Thank you for the question. It's my understanding that, as fifth most densely forested state in the nation, the that presents some challenges, specifically associated with the cost around vegetation management. And I understand there are other unique challenges to the geographic situation of Connecticut that may influence your energy costs.

I look forward to bringing the experience I have with grid modernization and balancing the need for economic progress along with environmental and clean energy progress to bear, and look forward to working
collaboratively with the Commissioners and staff at PURA to -- to bring that experience to bear on the electric crisis in Connecticut.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I appreciate that response because, you know, we get a lot of complaints from rate payers, you know, about the cost of energy here in the state of Connecticut, specifically electricity and, you know, there's been -- of course there's been opposition to the whole idea of creating more energy lines from environmental concerns. There's been concerns about whether Quebec Hydro is really hydro energy or whether it's fossil fuel energy posing as -- as hydro. Any thoughts on that?

MARISSA PASLICK GILLETT: Thank you for that question. It's my understanding that the fuels and resources that qualify for the renewable portfolio standard in Connecticut, are -- are -- have similarities and differences to the fields that qualify in other states. I can't speak specifically yet to the -- I'm sorry, the hydro issue with Quebec, but I look forward to discussing that with my staff and -- and to the extent that that falls in this jurisdiction of DEEP, I'm sure that Commissioner Dykes is quite on top of that.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): So, how long have you been on, about two weeks now?

MARISSA PASLICK GILLETT: Yes, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very good. Well, I'm sure it's been a baptism of fires. So, I congratulate you again, and I wish you well. And I'm looking forward, on behalf of all my constituents, which also happen to many of them rate payers, great success in trying --
MARISSA PASLICK GILLET: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- to reign in some of those energy costs. And that's it. Since we have no further Committee members here to ask any follow-up questions, you're excused.

MARISSA PASLICK GILLET: Thank you, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yeah. Congratulations. This may be a good thing, by the way, [laughter] because we have Session at 11:00 and some of members tend to get carried away. [laughter] Thank you very much. And that brings us -- so that's the conclusion of this Senate Joint Recommendations. And that brings us to the House Joint Resolutions. Oh, before you leave, Madam Commissioner Designee, there's always one question we have to ask of all our -- our nominees, and don't take it personal, but is there anything in your past that you believe would prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

MARISSA PASLICK GILLET: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay. That's it. And that brings us to House -- House Joint Resolutions for review. We have three of those. The first being, resolution confirming Erni Benham of Wallingford to be a voting member of the State Board of Education. And before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth, and nothing but the truth?

ERIN BENHAM: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated. And Ms. Bernham -- Benham, you have the floor.
ERIN BENHAM: Thank you. Good morning, Representative Vargas. My name is Erin Benham and it is an honor and privilege to be nominated by Governor Lamont. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share my interest and desire to continue to serve as a board member on the State Board of Education.

I am married to Richard Benham. We have two grown children, Thomas and Elizabeth, and are proud grandparents of Corbin Benham who attends Beacon Falls public schools. I reside in Wallingford where I was born and raised. I have spent the last 39 years working in the Meriden Public Schools. I was a classroom teacher for 36 years. And I am currently finishing my last term as the President of the Meriden Federation of Teachers, a position I have held for the past 12 years. As the President of the MFT, I have collaboratively worked with [inaudible - 00:13:25] professional communities, Extended Learning Time schools, and was directly involved in the creation and implementation of the present Teacher Evaluation System.

In 2014 I was nominated and appointed by Governor Malloy to -- to the State Board of Education. During my term on the Board, I served on the Legislative and Policy Development Committee, the Accountability and Support Committee, and the Search Committee for the Commissioner of Education. In addition, I have attended numerous State Board of Ed. related meetings and functions.

As a lifelong educator with experience in assessments, curriculum, evaluation, and leadership, I believe I am a valuable resource to the State Board of Education. If reappointed, I will continue to serve with the same passion and dedication I have
shown. I thank you for your time and consideration of my nomination. I look forward to answering any of your questions.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that presentation. I want to, on behalf of myself and the Committee, congratulate you on your reappointment by Governor Lamont. The fact that -- that he has retained you on the Board, speaks volumes in itself. So --

ERIN BENHAM: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- I believe that the Governor feels you make good contributions to the State Board of Education. As a retired teacher, I especially thank you, 35 years in the Hartford Public Schools.

ERIN BENHAM: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And I'd like to -- to -- to just make a quick statement that I make to all people being appointed to the State Board of Education. And that is, please slow down on all these alternate models like charter schools and magnet schools and the rest. I was a strong proponent of that when I was leader of the Teachers Union in Hartford as urban laboratories to help our neighborhood public schools. But, unfortunately, some of these systems, like [inaudible - 00:15:12] and others have proliferated and have become alternative school systems, that in some ways, I believe, are not quite as transparent as our public schools, draw a lot of resources out of our public schools. So, I think we have enough of these alternative schools to be able to measure their effectiveness. I think we need transparency. I think we need accountability, especially on behalf of the charter schools to privately run charters.
Since we've always had private education but it's always been privately funded and now we have privately run schools that are being publicly funded. So, we have to be very careful going down that road. I've had this discussion with my friend, Allan Taylor, many times, who Chairs the Board and lives in the city of Hartford. And it's something I feel very passionately about. And I think most of my colleagues, in the majority, here at the state legislature agree with me.

There may be some differences of opinion, but we believe that, you know, we really have to focus. We're over 90 percent of our kids are which they're basically housed in the neighborhood public schools and that's where most of the challenges are if we're going to close the -- the gap, the educational gap in Connecticut, which is an embarrassment to the state. We have to realize that most of those kids are the kids that are English limited, poor kids, kids that may have special needs, and many times those populations are reflected in the same numbers in some of those alternative programs.

So, I know it's supposed to be a blind lottery, but as you know, you've probably read in the newspapers that --

ERIN BENHAM: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- that some of the administrators in those schools have admitted that they don't always follow that.

But I congratulate you and I hope that -- that the State Board of Education is successful in continuing to improve education in the state of Connecticut. Do you have any thoughts in -- in the -- a new term
as a Board member in which you'd like to present? You have been involved in the policy area --

ERIN BENHAM: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- any views on that, that you can share with -- with me, and I'll be happy to share with the Committee members?

ERIN BENHAM: Well, actually your -- your statement that you made was very much taken up with policy development. Just recently, we've had a lot of discussions in that committee about school choice and making sure that, it is, indeed school choice for all of our children across the state of Connecticut. So, we've done a lot of work on that and will continue with that work because it was very important to members of that committee. We also have our five-year plan that we put in place that we will continue that will address equity issues across the state.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I appreciate that response. And you know, it was very distressing to me as a -- as an educator, 35-year educator, my wife as an educator, to have children bust in, you know, with funds from hedge fund managers --

ERIN BENHAM: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- and have little kids from the charter schools screaming that I don't care about kids or education. It's very -- very distressing, because I know most -- most public school principals can't afford to hire, you know, greyhound buses and bus in busloads of people. They don't have those kind of deep pockets.

And I remember touring one of the best model schools in -- in New York City which is Aviation High School
and speaking to the principal, because they set it up as -- as one of their most successful models, and it was wonderful. I got to see all the children working on jet engines and go to the hangars and see all these airplanes being worked on, and the kids were being mentored by aeronautic engineers, and it was just wonderful. But the principal kept on insisting that he got the same from the chancellor as any other public school in New York City.

And at the end, we had a Q&A session, and I asked the principal, how about these jet engines and these jets and all this, did you buy that out of your school budget? And he said, oh no, those were donated by Boeing and Pratt & Whitney, and the like. And so, it -- it was obvious to me, that there was millions and millions of dollars there that were not reflected in the per -- you know, per student, per capita that the chancellor was -- was giving them. Because I -- I imagine that a neighborhood public school principal, even to buy one of those jet engines, would have to bankrupt their school budget. So, it's not a -- a -- a fair playing field, in -- in my opinion. But thank you and congratulations again.

ERIN BENHAM: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And before you leave, we have one final question that we ask all nominees. Is there anything in your past that you believe would prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

ERIN BENHAM: No, there isn't.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

ERIN BENHAM: You're welcome. Thank you.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): By the way, I like the name Erin. I'll be there in October. This time, I'll be going to northern Ireland, Belfast and -- and Derry.

ERIN BENHAM: I have yet to go [inaudible - 00:20:06].

REP. VARGAS (6TH): [laughter].

ERIN BENHAM: [inaudible - 00:20:08].

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Let me see, that brings us to our second Joint House Resolution nominee, which is a resolution confirming Estella Lopez of East Hartford to be a voting member of the State Board of Education. Before you take a seat, Estella, would you please raise your right hand, and tell us that you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

ESTELLA LOPEZ: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated. And --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): The floor is yours, Estella.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you. Good morning, Representative Vargas. Thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before you and this Committee. I have served on the Board of Education in Connecticut for eight years. In the past two years, my fellow Board members selected me as the Vice Chair, something that I consider quite an honor. I've also chaired the Accountability and Support Committee. And I serve on the Academic Standards Committee. I do want to continue. I thought about whether this would be something that I wanted to do or not. But I do want to continue, because I've
seen progress and things that are in place, that I want to ensure continue and do make a difference.

You mentioned before, when you were interviewing my colleague, Erin, about the fact that we have to ensure that every school in Connecticut is accountable. We do bring the charter schools, when they are up for renewal, we do bring them and ask them, based on the 12 indicators, what is it that they have accomplished? We've been not giving them renewals of five years. We've give -- given them renewals of three years, because we've seen that suspensions are higher than at the state level. We've seen that they do multiple things that may be acceptable, but in other areas they are deficient. So, we are ensuring that they apply that they are in compliance with the state laws and legislation, including certification of teachers or qualifications of teachers.

We want to again, make sure that every school that Connecticut students attend is in compliance and we don't make exceptions. That's one area.

The other area where I'm interested in is ensuring that the diversity of the teachers in the state of Connecticut increases. The State Board did set a -- a goal increasing by 2021 to ten percent. It looks like a -- a low percentage, but that's about a thousand more teachers of course. So, the State Department started initiatives and strategies to achieve that goal, and I want to make sure that they continue. And that's two examples of things that I -- I think are in place. And again, I want to be present to ask questions and make sure that those goals are achievable.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for the -- your introductory remarks. And just for full disclosure, we've been friends for a long time.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Right.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And I know your work in higher education and I know of your work in the community. And I have full confidence, as does Governor Lamont in reappointing you again --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- for another term. So -- and congratulations on --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- being elected Vice Chair by your colleagues.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And you know, I -- you know -- you know, I'm an educator, you know my wife is an educator, you know I'm passionate about issues that have to do with our youth and --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And you heard the -- the remarks I made, you know, with the previous nominee.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Right.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And I'd like your thoughts on -- on that. Do you think the gap -- that we really can close the gap unless we address those kids that are in those neighborhood public schools?

ESTELLA LOPEZ: I -- I -- I -- I -- I totally agree. I think what we are seeing and I -- I'll give you
examples in two cities. Two schools that more or less have the same sample student population, one is in New Haven and one in Bristol, I will not name the schools, we visited, Erin and I visited the schools, one is really making a difference where you see leadership, you see a culture change, you see in-depth curriculum, you -- you see in-depth practices, learning practices. The other one -- none of those things are present. So, it's not making progress.

The challenge is how do we ensure that those things that we know work are really replicated. How do we ensure that we can scale the best practices and the good practices. We tend to pay more attention to things that don't work, but there are many good things that are happening in these schools across Connecticut that can be imitated and we can learn from. I do think it's doable.

I think, you know, having resources and funding and all that, all those things that are important, but in spite of those things, one can make progress. Again, if you have a culture that enhances learning, if you have deep learning practices, if you have not focusing on 20 things but on, you know, on three or four things that are really significant like reading, writing, arithmetic, you know, the three Rs, traditional R's, and then having an environment that engages students. And you can see. You walk into schools, you can see those things. I'm very optimistic. I think it's doable.

Yet, there are places and -- and situations where, for a number of reasons, the progress is not there. And part of what we do, you know, and I was just talking to my colleague before the hearing started, how can we, as an accountability and a Board, ensure
that -- that's the highest priority for every school, for every superintendent for every school, how do we make that happen, ensure, and make it visible that it's not acceptable to be mediocre. That it's not acceptable not to teach our students in the best ways that we can. It's -- it's not an easy solution. It requires multiple interventions and practices, but I'm optimistic that we can do it.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you for that response. I think we -- you and I may have had this conversation privately before, but, you know, some of my colleagues were upset -- my public school colleagues were upset with documentaries like Waiting For Superman and -- similar programs that show how successful some of these charter school models are at the expense of showing how poor the neighborhood public schools are.

And -- but I took a different listen. When I look at those documentaries, I get a different idea of what's going on. For example, I remember one principal saying, when being asked by -- by the interviewer, why is this young girl doing so well in your school and they were doing so terribly in their neighborhood public school? And I remember the principal saying, well, you can't teach a kid if they're not there. And at their old school, they had a transportation problem. They never -- were absent half of the school year. Here, we provide transportation --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- to make sure the kid is here every single day. Well, what was wrong with Bobby over there? Well, Bobby would fall asleep at his old school because he had no breakfast, whatever the
reason was. Here, we provided a hot breakfast every morning for all our students. So, I kept looking at it. And I kept saying well, why is it that the neighborhood school can't provide those --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Right.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- same kind of services? And I know we don't like to talk about resources, but the fact is, that it seems to me, that a lot of these model schools, that the Harlem School and other schools that are being ballyhooed as great success, well, have a lot of resources from corporations, from -- I mean, it's a sexy thing to support the latest model.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Right.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And you get Bill Gates, you get this one, you get that one to support you. The neighborhood public school doesn't seem to attract that kind of support. So, I'm hoping that -- that we address that, because, you know, I know that there's a lot. Some of the problems seem intractable. But I believe, like you do, that -- that there is hope and there is improvement and that we'll be able to -- to provide all kids a good education. Because I think -- I do really believe it's poor kids, special needs kids, and English limited kids are the populations that are really getting the short end of the stick.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Absolutely. I think in charter schools, what we're seeing is very high suspensions. So, that's one thing, when they come before us for renewal, we really make sure that they are accountable for that, because they may have students coming but then whatever happens, they're suspending students at a 20 percent rate. I think the
suspension rate for Connecticut is 10 percent. So, it's double the rate of suspension for some charter schools.

The other thing that we want to make sure that happens is that they are representative of the population where they are situated. As you know, they have to have English language learners and students that are, you know, have special needs and -- and so on and so forth. So, we want to make sure that they are really providing access to everybody and not necessarily to a few.

I do feel we're doing a better job of that aspect, and again, ensuring that they are -- they have the qualifications -- the teachers have the qualifications that are required. I do agree that some of them have a lot of resources and, therefore, are able to do things that others cannot -- public schools cannot do. And that's -- you know, especially when students living in -- come from lower socioeconomic, that's something that is very critical and important to be exposed to, you know, richness and -- and things that help them to -- to learn and to see a different type of world than from their houses and neighborhoods. Good morning.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I truly appreciate that. And I welcome my two colleagues, our ranking -- one of -- no -- one of our -- one -- one of members on the other side of the aisle, Representative Yaccarino. I -- I don't -- I don't see Representative Perillo yet, but I was explaining how we're in the -- in the budget process and many of our members also are in Appropriations and Finance and other committees.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I was in Finance Committee [inaudible - 00:30:51].
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very good. Well, I appreciate it, Representative Yaccarino. See our other colleague, Senator Moore on my side of the aisle. So, we're -- we're actually in the item number two in the second part of our agenda, resolution confirming Estella Lopez of East Hartford to be a voting member of the State Board of Education. We're just having a little back and forth on our neighborhood schools versus some of the sexier models that have cropped up in the last few years and -- and what we can do to improve education for some of the neediest kids, to see if we can close the educational gap. So, at this point, if there's any questions, you'd like to ask, Ms. Lopez, either one of my colleagues? If not, well I --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): If I can -- if I -- just thank you for stepping up to serve. And -- and it's so important for -- for especially our youngest kids to have a good education --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Yes, they are.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): -- in reading, especially.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Yes.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): That's all. But thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you. It -- it's an honor to serve on the State Board. It's really an honor, you know. I -- I wrote in my very brief remarks that I am here before you because I was afforded an education when my family came to this country. So, I really owe it and I want to pay back as much as I can, because it's important.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much. If we have no further comments or questions from -- from the
Committee, I have one final question we ask of all nominees. Do you believe there's anything in your past that might prove embarrassing either to this Committee, to the Governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

ESTELLA LOPEZ: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much --

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank --

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- Estella.

ESTELLA LOPEZ: Thank you so much.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that brings us to our final resolution, which is a resolution confirming Tarini Krishna of Ridgefield to be a non-voting student member of the State Board of Education. And Tarini, before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

TARINI KRISHNA: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated. We love to see student participation on our State Board of Education and we're happy that the Governor has appointed you. And -- and the floor is yours to make your initial presentation.

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you. Good morning, Representative Vargas and all members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Tarini Krishna and it is an honor and a privilege to be appointed as a Student Representative to the Connecticut State Board of Education by Governor Lamont. My sincere thanks to this Committee for the opportunity to appear before
you to speak about my desire to serve on the State Board of Education as a student member.

I have attended Ridgefield Public Schools from the time I was in kindergarten and I'll be graduating from the high school in June. I have been dancing for the past ten years at a local studio in ballet, modern, jazz, and tap. I have also represented my high school class as a senator on student government for the past four years. For the past four years, I've also competed on my high school's mock trial team, and this year I led the team as captain.

In 2017, I had the honor of arguing as an attorney in front of the Connecticut Supreme Court Justices and winning the Top Mock Trialer Award. My team then competed at the national competition. I am also a mentor at a community organization called Ms. President US, which is dedicated to empowering fourth through eighth grade girls with skills in public speaking and leadership and teaching them about civics, so they, too, can have the confidence to run for office. And last night, I was awarded the Connecticut Association of Board of Education Student Award.

However, I would not be the person I am if it were not for my family. My parents relentlessly encouraged me to explore my passions even when I had my doubts. They are both inspirations to me. My dad immigrated to the United States from India to complete his Masters and PhD. And after my mother immigrated to the US, she completed a Masters in the Art of Teaching and became a teacher. They have given me a love for education and taught me the importance of hard work and compassion. I am also lucky enough to have a close relationship with my older brother, with whom I share a variety of
interests with. I'm grateful for the unwavering support we give each other in each of our endeavors.

I now want to take a moment to discuss why I want to serve on the Board. Throughout my academic career, I took for granted the vast educational and extracurricular resources and opportunities provided by my school and my dedicated teachers who encouraged me, challenged, and engaged me to expand my intellectual horizon. I unequivocally associated public schools with equal opportunity.

Unfortunately, that is not the reality for many students in Connecticut. Often times, the town a student lives in or the circumstances they cannot control, determines the quality of their education and the opportunities available to them. But an excellent education, with the respective resources, should not be reserved for the few privileged elite but the norm for everyone. Using my position on the Board, I have to continue to advocate for expanded academic opportunities, particularly for minority students and low income students, so they, too, can realize their dreams.

I also want to thank my fellow Board members for their respect and attentiveness to my comments and questions during meetings. Since September, I have learned an incredible amount on how the Board is confronting and overcoming socioeconomic disparities in education, the effects of charter schools, and education policy. During a break at the October Board meeting, at which now congresswoman Jahana Hayes testified, she told me to always remember, that students are the ones who experience the deepest consequences of decisions made by those in power. As a student member on the Board, it is my responsibility to use my voice to ensure that the
decisions before us positively impact students' education.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to be among Board members who actively work towards overcoming the educational inequities in Connecticut. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that presentation. That's quite a lot of achievement for a young person like you, so you're obviously one of Connecticut's top students. And I know that I speak on behalf of the Committee when I congratulate you on your appointment by the Governor for the -- as a Student Representative on the State Board of Education. I know you have a lot to offer and a lot to bring. I was reviewing your bio. I see you've taken a lot of those advanced placement courses. So, you're probably going to save yourself at least more than a semester, probably almost a full year of college by the time you get there. I'm sure your mother will be very proud of that, especially her pocketbook will be very thankful. [laughter]

And -- and I just see that you have a love of music and that you're a dancer. Have you ever picked up an -- a musical instrument?

TARINI KRISHNA: Yes. I played flute for a year in high school and throughout middle school. And I have played piano for almost ten years now.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That's wonderful. I meant -- I just don't know how you manage to have the -- enough hours in the day to be involved in all the things you're involved in. But I guess, I remember when I was younger, I could burn the candle on both ends of the stick [laughter], you know, but not so much
these days. That 14-1/2 hours on minimum wage debate, I think left us all drained --

TARINI KRISHNA: Uh-huh.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- that all-nighter. I really am very happy with your appointment and I congratulate you. I really have, you know, no real questions to ask you, because I know you bring the student perspective to the Board and you'll do a good job at doing that. And you realize that many of your fellow students don't have not been afforded the same opportunities, and you'll be a champion for that. So, at this time, I'll open it up to Committee members. Yes, Senator Moore?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Congratulations. Quite impressive --

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): -- resume. I see -- so you're graduating in June?

TARINI KRISHNA: Yes.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): And where -- where will you be going to college?

TARINI KRISHNA: I'll be attending Barnard College at Columbia University in the fall.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Okay. Well, I'm really impressed with what you've been able to accomplish. And at the level that you've been able to accomplish it also. I've been to some mock trials at Trumbull High School. And it's so professional, that you would not know, if you closed your eyes, you wouldn't know it was young people giving -- doing the mock trial or answering questions or asking
questions. So, congratulations for rising to the top.

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you. Trumbull is our --

SENATOR MOORE: You're a great choice --

TARINI KRISHNA: -- biggest competitor.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): -- for us. I know you represent. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, very much. We joined -- we've been joined by my colleague from the neighboring town of West Hartford, Representative Verrengia, whose district in Elmwood borders my district in South Hartford. We're at the -- the final nominee, which is the Student Representative to the State Board of Education. And her name is Tarini Krishna. And she has quite an outstanding resume. And I was just opening up for Committee members. Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for stepping up and volunteering. And you should be very proud of yourself. And -- but for a senior, what do you think for students in your town and the state, the most pressing issue is? I mean, there so -- it's so complex today to be -- I think, a young person? Do you have any recommendations or things that you notice that we could do better in -- in challenges for -- for -- for -- for kids or young adults?

TARINI KRISHNA: I think one of the most transformative experiences entering the high school was having a group of teachers who really mentored and challenged me throughout all of high school. Some teachers, who I could go to whenever I was struggling in a class, and they would give me great
advice or encourage me to join certain activities to expand my high school experience and academic experiences. And I think that empowering teachers with the resources they need to help see the light in their students and be able to encourage them to aspire to whatever they want to be is incredibly important. I know, in my town, sometimes there is tensions between the administration and the teachers regarding curriculum, the classes offered, or even the freedom to teach their students as they see fit. And often times, the way they see fit, is often times the best way to teach the students.

But on a state level, I've seen in front of the Board how they really try to help ensure that there are minority teachers who serve as role models for the students in their communities. And I think that's incredibly important. And I see the difference that that makes just based on the school results after there is a large like infusion of -- of minority students who can help students of color and minority students. So, that is one aspect I feel that can really transform a student's education into something that makes them love learning and want to go on and achieve higher education, as well.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): That's -- makes a lot of sense and I think sometimes we muddle the waters, politicians, unfortunately, for -- teachers need freedom and -- and -- and confidence from -- from one -- and students. So, but I -- I think you're going to do well. And I really appreciate you stepping up. And just enjoy your education and -- and have fun. And -- and congratulations to your folks, also.

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. So, are you planning to be a lawyer?

TARINI KRISHNA: That is one of the possibilities.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I see you have an interest in international law.

TARINI KRISHNA: Yeah.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And you've served on the United Nations Student Committee, too?

TARINI KRISHNA: Yeah.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): How was that experience?

TARINI KRISHNA: It was wonderful. I met a lot of individuals from different areas and got to learn about their experiences. I had a very interesting conversation with an individual who lived in Turkey right when the Syrian refugee crisis was at its height, and she discussed a lot about the feelings of many like individuals who lived in the Turkish -- Turkish towns closest to the border.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you for sharing so much. By the way, today is your 18th birthday. Is that correct?

TARINI KRISHNA: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Happy birthday --

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): -- on behalf of the Committee. It's a wonderful thing that you're -- that you're
coming before us on your 18th birthday, and some ways, you're finally an adult. So --

TARINI KRISHNA: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): The -- there's just one last question that we ask of all our nominees. And is there anything in your past that you believe would prove embarrassing to the -- to this Committee, to the Governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

TARINI KRISHNA: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, that's it. That concludes this portion of the public hearing and you're excused.

TARINI KRISHNA: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): At this point, is -- I ask of those present, is there anyone from the public that would either like to speak in favor or against any of the nominees that we've interviewed today? Anyone from the public that wishes to speak on any of the nominees? If no one from the public wishes to speak, Madam Clerk, do we have any written communications regarding any of the nominees? Seeing no written communications, that concludes the public portion of this hearing.

And now, I'll call into order our business meeting. And that brings us to the first order of business. And we have a Senator with us, so it's a Joint Resolution. It's always good to have a Senate colleague here to help us with these motions. The first is a resolution confirming Marissa Paslick Gillett as a -- as a Utility Commissioner of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority. Is there a motion?
SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Senator Moore has made the motion.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Second.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Seconded by Representative Yaccarino. Will the Clerk please take the roll?

CLERK: Duff? Vargas?

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes.


SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yes.

CLERK: Verrengia? Witkos? Yaccarino?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That brings us to the House Resolutions for first one being the resolution confirming Erin Benham of Wallingford to be a voting member of the State Board of Education. Is there a motion?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Motion.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Been moved by Representative Yaccarino.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Second.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Seconded by Senator Moore. Will the -- since this is a Joint Resolution, all members of the Committee may vote. Will -- is there any variation from the previous vote? We're all voting in the affirmative? Will the Clerk reflect that the
three members of the Committee present vote in the affirmative?

CLERK: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That brings us to our second resolution, which is a resolution confirming Estella Lopez of East Hartford to be a voting member of the State Board of Education. Do I have a motion?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Moved by Representative Yaccarino.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Second.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Seconded by Senator Moore. Do any of the members wish to vary their vote in any way? If not, will the Clerk reflect that all the votes were in the affirmative?

CLERK: Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay. And that brings us to our final resolution, a resolution confirming Tarini Krishna of Ridgefield to be a non-voting student member of the State Board of Education. Is there a motion?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Motion.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Moved by Senator Moore.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Second.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Seconded by Representative Yaccarino. We have a new member, so please take the roll.

CLERK: Duff? Vargas?
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes.


SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yes.

CLERK: Verrengia?

REP. VERRENGIA (30TH): Yes.

CLERK: Witkos? Yaccarino?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): As previously announced, the Clerk will announce through the PA system to all members of the Committee that the votes will be held open for their vote until 4:00 p.m. Is there any further business on the agenda?

CLERK: Sir, I believe we can only hold the votes open until the start of the first session.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Oh. So, we'll have to announce that at 11:00 a.m., we close the vote. So, that gives people about an hour and 10 minutes to vote. So, can we get that on the PA as soon as possible?

CLERK: Yes, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And can you please announce the time and place of our next meeting?

CLERK: We will have a public hearing, followed by a Committee meeting, May 16th which is this Thursday, 9:00 o'clock.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): So, the day after tomorrow, Thursday, we have another Committee meeting at 9:00 a.m. So, we'll announce that and send out the
appropriate emails. Any other further business from Committee members? If not, the meeting is recessed until the beginning of session at 11:00 a.m.