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Education Committee Public Hearing
March 6, 2020
Regarding Bills: HB 5221, SB 173, SB 314, HB 5220, HB 5222, HB 5380

Testimony on HB 5221, SB 173, SB 314, HB 5220, HB 5222, HB 5380

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Ranking Member Representative McCarty and Senator Berthel, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Subira Gordon and I am Executive Director of ConnCAN.

Today, I am here to testify in support of:

- H.B. 5221 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT;
- S.B. No. 173 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT;
- S.B. No. 314 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM;
- H.B. No. 5220 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM OR ENROLLED IN CERTAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS;
- H.B. No. 5222 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES; and
- H.B. No. 5380 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LITERACY.

ConnCAN is deeply committed to equity throughout our education systems. These bills will improve equity, expand access, and support academic achievement. Together, they will have a lasting impact on students, families and communities throughout Connecticut.

HB 5221 AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

ConnCAN believes that Connecticut should develop education policies based on careful study, analysis and reflection. To do this, we must bring together experts in the field to discuss pertinent problems and develop actionable solutions.

HB 5221 creates a space for experts, practitioners and decision makers to come together to better understand an issue and propose recommendations, both legislative and regulatory, that will help improve education for our young people.

ConnCAN does, however, recommend that the study group has more time to form, research, analyze and produce solutions. Right now, the May 26, 2020 timeline appears too short.

SB 173 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut has one of the largest and most persistent opportunity gaps in the country. For decades, students of color have had limited access to high-quality schools, and as a result, are less likely to graduate high school, attend college, and reach their potential. Throughout the state, no matter the income or characteristics of the community, students of color achieve at lower levels than their white peers. We must ask ourselves why. Why do these disparities exist and what must we do urgently to address these issues to close the opportunity gap?

SB 173 creates a framework that districts use to understand, measure and assess the quality and equity of their education programming. This is an essential step to reduce disparities and to embed equity conversations into decision-making.

ConnCAN believes that this framework, in partnership with a reconstituted Educational Opportunity Gap Taskforce (SB 313), will shine a necessary light on how our schools function, and provide essential insights for how we improve together.

SB 314; AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Last year, ConnCAN was proud to work with the Education committee on landmark legislation supporting Black and Latino studies in high school. This work acknowledged the gaping hole in Connecticut curriculum around representation and equity in history. As our curricula becomes more inclusive, we must address all historically marginalized groups, including Native Americans.

Indigenous peoples have made incredible contributions to our modern world but have received little recognition. Additionally, Native Americans have faced extraordinary hardship due to violent American policies aimed to reduce, restrict and, in many cases destroy, Native American culture and land. Our young people must understand the full context and content of American history in order to learn from our past and create a more equitable, inclusive world.

SB 314 ensures that students throughout Connecticut learn about the contributions and treatment of Indigenous peoples.

HB 5220: AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM OR ENROLLED IN CERTAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Parental investment in early childhood education yields positive outcomes for children. However, childcare in Connecticut and across the country is often prohibitively expensive. This is especially true for parents who are participating in educational programs themselves.

HB 5220 expands the eligibility for Care4Kids to parents participating in educational programs, including educator preparation and alternative route to certification programs. This will help encourage parents to become teachers and has the opportunity to diversify the teaching profession here in Connecticut.

HB 5222: AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES

ConnCAN cares deeply about equity and the role that education plays in breaking the cycle of poverty. Homeless families are extremely vulnerable and benefit most from a stable, reliable education system for young people. By expanding Care4Kids to include homeless families, Connecticut will help get folks back on their feet. School is a place where all children, regardless of their circumstances, should feel welcome. HB 5222 is a great step to ensure access and equity in our early childhood programs.

HB 5380: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LITERACY

Less than 6 in 10 (55.7%) students in Connecticut are on track for college and career in reading. For some communities fewer than 1 in 10 are on track, including a school in New Britain, Bridgeport, and three schools in right here in Hartford. In fact, for overall district performance:

- Just 1 in 5 (20.2%) New Britain students are at/above grade level in ELA;
- Just 1 in 4 (24.5%) Hartford students are at/above grade level in ELA;
- Under 3 in 10 (27.4%) Bridgeport students are at/above grade level in ELA; and
- Just 3 in 10 (30.3%) Waterbury students are at/above grade level in ELA.

Literacy skills determine future outcomes. Students who cannot read fluently by the end of grade 3 face an uphill climb to high school graduation, college attendance and job placement. In fact, [Research shows](#) that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. This must change. We know the science behind proper literacy instruction and we must double-down on practices we know work.

ConnCAN supports the concepts of HB 5380 because it provides more coordination and support for schools to move the needle on literacy rates.

Connecticut has implemented successful literacy intervention programs and supports in the past. We must expand those programs to support more children, not less ConnCAN hopes that this bill addresses the gap between policy and implementation through technical support and coordination.

To improve the bill, ConnCAN believes that private donations, including philanthropic grants lessen state costs, improve flexibility of funding, and increase results-based accountability.

Together, with proper resources and instruction, Connecticut schools can close the literacy gap. We must act urgently.

Thank you.

About ConnCAN: *ConnCAN is leading a movement to improve education outcomes for Connecticut's kids. We bring advocates, policymakers, parents and educators together to change the system and give all kids access to the great public schools they deserve. Learn more at conncan.org.*