

CHAIRPERSONS: Senator Douglas McCrory,
Representative Robert Sanchez

SENATORS: Berthel, Daugherty Abrams,
Champagne, Flexer, Kushner,
Miller

REPRESENTATIVES: McCarty, Barry, Bolinsky,
Callahan, Candelaria, Cook,
Comey, Currey, Devlin, Exum,
Felipe, Fiorello, Genga,
Gibson, Haines, Johnson,
Kennedy, Leeper, McGee,
Napoli, Nolan, Parker, Petit,
Smith, Veach, Welander

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Good morning, everyone, and good morning Members of the Education Committee. We're here on St. Patty's day, and we're going to have our final Public Hearing on the Bills that we discussed this legislative session. We have over 100 individuals who want to come up before our Committee and testify, and like I always said, every last person who wants to testify knows that what they have to bring to us is very important, and we have to give them our unconditional attention.

The clock will be set up for three minutes, at two minutes and 30 seconds, you will get a warning from my time keeper to summarize your comments. And I will ask that my Committee Members, if someone says something that moves you to the point that you need to ask a question, please be mindful, ask your question, but be mindful of other Committee Members who might have a question otherwise, and just let's try to limit to one question, and maybe one response or rebuttal.

With that being said, I'm going to pass it over to my Co-Chair, he may have some words and then our Ranking Members will have a have some words and then

we go right into our Public Hearing. Bobby, it's your floor.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and happy St. Patty's day to everyone. I will be removing my hat pretty soon, though, because it might distract a lot of people. But just looking forward to this public hearing, and as my Co-Chair stated, you know, we're going to hold it up to three minutes for the people that are testifying and if we stick to that, we can get through this pretty quick today. So I'm going to move this on to our Ranking Member, Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I too would like to just wish everyone a very happy St. Patrick's day. It's a pleasure to be here at our third public hearing. And I'm looking forward to listening to all the testimony today on some very important issues that we're facing, so thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): So is Senator Berthel -- is Senator Berthel with us today?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): I think he'll be joining shortly. He was just -- we were just over at the Cave event, so I think he'll be joining us.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, all right, well, with that being said, we can begin our public hearing. First person up in order, and how we're going to do this, we will have a individuals from the public speak, also we'll interchange them with individuals from State Department of Education and officials.

We're going to start off like we always start every meeting off with our Commissioner, our acting Commissioner, I call her doctor, but she's really Charlene Russell-Tucker. Dr. Charlene Russell-Tucker, it's your floor.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you, Senator, good morning, and good morning to all. Good morning McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee. I am Charlene Russell-Tucker, as you know, acting Commissioner off the Connecticut Department of Education.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to testify before you today regarding a series of important education related proposals in your agenda. You have my extensive written comments pertaining to many Bills before you today, so in the interest of time, I will not go through them one by one. Today's agenda is full of very important proposals, however, there are two that I will highlight very briefly. The first is HB 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

I would first like to thank the Black and Puerto Rican caucus, and Senator Miller, in particular, for your steadfast commitment towards shared goals of promoting literacy and closing opportunity gaps within our state. We completely support in concept the creation of a center for literacy research and reading success. However, we would ask and strongly recommend that that center be housed within the department. It is critical that the department provides leadership in setting the commitment for effective literacy instruction for all Connecticut students. We all continue to do this work in partnership with the University of Connecticut, Literacy How, Hill for Literacy, and other emerging really well placed partners. So please see my testimony for additional comments, the department is very excited to be a partner in this work.

And the second is House Bill -- Senate Bill 1031 [sic] -- 34, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. I'd like to thank the Committee again for your steadfast commitment to supporting the department in our work to increase

the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. In 2016 our State Board of Education adopted a five year comprehensive plan ensuring equity and excellence for all Connecticut students, initiating the development of strategies to increase the number of educators of color from 8.3 to 10% by 2021, which equates to a thousand certified education of -- educators of color within five years. We're currently at 9.6%, and moving steadily towards meeting that goal.

The department is generally supportive of this proposal aimed at continuing that progress, however, I would ask that you read my full written comments on this proposal and take them into consideration.

With that, I will stop here and direct you once again to my written testimony. I and the rest of my team will be happy to take your questions. On screen, you have deputy Commissioner Nesmith and Laura Stefon. And behind the scenes we've got Ajit Gopalakrishnan our Chief Performance Officer, Irene Parisi our Chief Academic Officer, Melissa Hickey our Reading Director, Kathy Demsey our CFO, Attorney General Jessa Mirtle, John Frassinelli our Director of Health Services and Support Services, and Chris Todd from our Bureau our Talent Office. So we have a team ready, willing, and able to answer all your questions. Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): And thank you, Commissioner. I will start off, I'll have two quick questions.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): I'm sorry. Is the cards the same number for my wife is for me --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): So okay, someone mute Representative Nolan, please. Thank you. Yes, Commissioner, my first question on 6620, it sounds like the only question or concern you have with 6620 is the fact that you would like this -- the center for literacy and research to be held in the SD office, is that correct?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Is that the only concern you have with 6620? And why --

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Senator?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Yes. So yes, in the -- we are really interested in having that office located within the department for all the reasons we've noted in the -- in our testimony. We have a construct set up to support our districts through our academic office or turnaround office, and we already have some resource that --resources dedicated, staff resources dedicated to be supportive in aligning all these efforts together.

And so, if we're able to do that, it -- really make sure that our efforts are not bifurcated. When we're working, for example, with Alliance Districts all of the supports can come to bear versus individually trying to reach out and work on literacy, independent of all the efforts that we're working on together. And so that's really where we think for the leadership, and this would not at all exclude our partners. Right, we would do it -- we'll be doing this with all the partners together, but there are some specific carve outs here that the Alliance District should do certain things with the Senator, and I'm looking at my colleague deputy Commissioner Nesmith who's overseen all that -- all those efforts. We need to be -- make sure that they are truly aligned and coordinated for the most effective outcomes.

So that really is what we're thinking about. So the department with the center here will then be able to leverage the other issues that's in the Bill about setting up assessments. We are really thrilled about being able to have state wide assessments

around literacy and all the other things that we're able to do.

You all also know that we have resources that's coming to us through our -- the CARE's fund. It would -- really would be good for us to be able to leverage all of that immediately to be able to do this work. And I don't know if Deputy Commissioner Nesmith would like to add to that especially around the Alliance District's work.

DESI NESMITH: Thank you, Commissioner. I think you made the point here that, you know, we want to align the efforts that we currently have ongoing as we work closely with these districts, and one of the things that we changed with working with the Alliance District program is we realized that we needed to tear the level of support. So we have a subset of those districts that are known as the opportunity districts that are very high touch districts, that we have teams already established at the agency that work directly with these districts.

And so it makes sense for this to be housed within SDE so that all of those supports, there's alignment and consistency in how we deliver those supports to those districts.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, okay, okay, thanks for that. I think my colleagues Senator Billie Miller will probably ask you some further questions on that one. And my last question would be in regards to MTR. Is there something specifically, I know you can -- presented testimony, but is there -- I just want to know is there something specific you would like to see by in tune with the MTR Bill?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So in that Bill, Senator, I think it also reference the edTPA programming and we did have some concerns there as well. So that's there as well, and my colleague Chris Todd is on, I don't know if there's anything else you'd like to add to that, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER TODD: Good morning, Senator, and Members of the Committee. The big piece that we'd like to add about the proposed MTR Bills, we would just like to see the expansion of the program offerings to both traditional route educator preparation program, in addition to alternative route educator preparation programs.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'm sorry, I didn't get the last part. You would like see what offered?

CHRISTOPHER TODD: So we would like to see the residency program be expanded to include both traditional route programs and alternative route programs for certification. So we want to broaden the pool of candidates that would be eligible for this, and it would be in keeping with the department's proposed legislation about broadening access to the resident educator permit.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, I mean, if I have any other questions, I'll ask them offline. Thank you. Representative Sanchez.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So good morning, Commissioner Tucker, and staff. My question, and I have a lot of questions but I'm just going to ask you one, and it's on HB 6619, the development of a kindergarten to eighth grade model curriculum.

I know that into your testimony, your testimony you state that the time that we're given here to get this accomplished is not long enough. I mean you would probably add another year in my thinking about it -- if we were to extend that to January 1st of 2024, would that help? That's one part of the question and the other is, I know you also mentioned here that current staff capacity and budget constraints. So could you give us an example of how many other staff members you would need in order to develop this curriculum and what would be an estimated cost?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So thank you, Representative, great questions, thank you for that. We would -- we started to look at that and to cost it out. We don't have that exactly here ready for you, but we can certainly send that to you. The concept, though, is that we would need some added capacity in order to do that work and to speed up the time frame on it.

The Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi is here, and I know she's working on some other current work in model curricula that we're developing, so we have a good idea of what that would need for us additionally. So, Irene, would you just like to quickly respond to that? And then we can work specifically, Representative, to get you very specific information about a cost associated with this.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

IRENE PARISI: Yes, thank you, Commissioner. Good morning, Senator and Committee Members. Yes, we did an internal assessment to see what we could prioritize and expedite. So, as you know, we've shared before, we have one education consultant dedicated to each of the content areas, and using the work that we've done in partnership with SERC with the African American, Black and Puerto Rican and Latino studies, it was over two years' worth of work, hundreds of hours, and a team of people. So we know that with the right supports and with the plan that we've put in place and right now we are prioritizing mathematics, six, eight, K-three literacy, as well as K-five social studies and six, eight science.

And again with the team members we have, one dedicated to each area, we would like to expand that and scale that so we know that with support, we could adjust that timeline and put those resources

in the hands of teachers in a much more timely manner.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, and would you be able to get back to me with like an estimated amount and what -- estimated amount of staff members that you would need, and also in your eyes how much the cost would be to develop the curriculum?

IRENE PARISI: Sure, I can. [crosstalk]

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I just want to add the follow up with you Representative Sanchez in regards to cost. With the resources coming from the federal government, and I believe hundreds of millions of dollars will be coming to SDE. And you guys, you retrieve some of those dollars. In my personal opinion, I think, resources are there and we have two years to spend those dollars. I think financially, we could do this, and I think this something we have to do.

If I heard you right, Irene, did you say you're already starting working on a model curriculum in math in certain grades in early -- I'm thinking early education. So the work is already -- has begun. Is that correct?

IRENE PARISI: That is correct.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, okay, all right. Any other questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We do have our Ranking Member Representative McCarty with her hand up, and then followed by Senator Miller.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative McCarty, it's your floor.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Commissioner, and -- there you are. Thank you very much for your really extensive

written comments to all of the various proposals today. It's really much appreciated. Senator -- Representative Sanchez asked -- I was looking at the model curriculum, but it leads me to the next question, you know, as the education Committee we receive so many valuable proposals with good topics, and this was an effort to try to accommodate some of those good suggestions.

It leads me also, though, into the high school requirements, as you know, we've just recently, managed to get those requirements down and took a lot of hard work, looking at person centered requirement for our students and offering flexibility. So would you be able to comment on SB 1033, the inclusion of computer science and financial literacy as part of the high school graduation requirements, what your opinion is? Those are valuable topics but we want -- you know, we try to watch that we're not putting so many more mandates on our high school requirements at this time.

So that would be -- and if you'll permit me, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to kind of pivot over also to the edTPA assessments and the pre-service work of our teacher preparation. If you could just see if there's maybe a compromise that we could come to in that regard. So kind of cheated a little bit, but if you could answer those questions, I'd appreciate it.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you, Representative. And so you made such a key point in terms of the effort that was made to change our graduation requirements and, as you know, it passed and then got kind of pushed a few years for implementation due to the complexity of routing them out as a matter of practice within our districts, and also to make sure that students have choice. And that is really why we were -- we're saying at this time that you go for it and add other requirements by -- at this time really needs the

more time and effort, again, based on the effort that it just took for us to get here. So I'm going to have -- I think it's -- or -- well, Desi, would you like to jump in here or to also address that a bit?

DESI NESMITH: Yeah, so I think it's important that, as we looked at this, we're looking at the balance between requirement and kids ability to choose electives as well, and just being mindful of the things that we want to promote versus the things that we want to put into existing requirements for graduation at this point.

Irene, I know that our Chief Academic Officer is on and I noted our reading director is on as well, is there anything that you want to add to that, Irene?

IRENE PARISI: I would -- yes, thank you Deputy, Commissioner, I think it is important to highlight that the -- we've all are committed to giving students a voice and choice in planning their High School career. And so by expecting another mandate, it reduces the number of options for opens in their schedule to choose those electives that is aligned with their student success planning, as well as their pathway that they're on. Thank you.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Could you speak to the inclusion right now of financial literacy and our STEM efforts.

IRENE PARISI: Sure, so that is the beauty of the graduation requirements that there are many courses that do allow for that STEM credit, and personal finance or financial literacy is one of them. And many districts already have made the commitment to having personal finance or financial literacy as a graduation requirement. More main move in that direction, but again by having it as a stem elective, personal finance does meet that requirement, and I think having that, it allows for

flexibility for school districts to make those decisions with their board of education.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Before -- Do you have another question, Representative McCarty?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well, I don't think we quite answered -- finished, but thank you for asking. So I appreciate those answers a very much from the department. And then I did ask about looking over at the edTPA on the teacher preparation if there may be some solutions. I know as we're going to hear today a lot of testimony about concerns with the assessment, and just from the department's point of view, if you think there might be some flexibility there that we could work something out because I know the edTPA was just put in place only a few years ago and has been recognized by the state level and nationally as a good assessment, but we also hear many concerns from our young teachers and preparation.

So just from the department's point, do you think we can find some form of compromise on the edTPA assessment? Thank you.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: And Representative, I think you're referring the edTPA. Right, and so I see that Chris turn his camera on again. I -- yes, we would like to continue to have this conversation. We have behind us, there was a working group that you may be aware of that met and issued a report in January of 2020 that we're taking a look at again to see, you know, what is it about implementation, what is it that we need to look at to make sure that we're -- that this is meeting the needs, right, for all our educators for the outcomes that we're looking for as well. Chris, I know you've got your camera on.

CHRISTOPHER TODD: Yes, thank you, Commissioner. Representative, I would just add, you know, to Commissioners point, I think we are in constant

conversations with our edTPA programs across the State of Connecticut. We have worked with them hand in hand since 2016 to implement edTPA and to have a slow rollout of edTPA in Connecticut. And we believe that edTPA as a portfolio based assessment actually provides candidates a greater likelihood of finding success, and our of first year of full implementation, Connecticut showed that the vast majority of candidates are being successful in edTPA the first time around. But it is something that we will continue to work with our programs and support.

As the Commissioner said, I think the department would strongly encourage for the adoption of the recommendations that were developed as a result of the edTPA working group.

In January 31st of this past year, which included looking at providing funding or state allocated funding to offset the cost of the edTPA portfolio assessment for candidates.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And I appreciate those answers, and I'll try to say it properly, edTPA, so you'll understand what I'm referring to. But I appreciate the department's consideration on that, and I'm looking forward to hearing the testimony today. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Miller. I mean, Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Oh, you can call me Representative, you can call me Senator. [laughter] So good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Commissioner, thank you for joining us this morning, as well as your team. Your testimony is a breath of fresh air for me. The SDE has partnered with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and need being the lead on our initiatives for reading and literacy in this state, and it wasn't an easy

decision to have the center housed somewhere else,
so with SERC because --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Senator Miller, I'm sorry to
interrupt. But your camera is off.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Can you see me now?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): I'm sorry. I apologize.
thank you. So -- but thank you for your commitment
to have the center housed with SDE, and I think it's
a great idea to have it there if we have the
commitment. So my question to you is in your -- in
your testimony you had mentioned the word
achievement, that the word *achievement* should remain
in the Bill and *opportunity* should also be in the
Bill. So if one of you could send something over to
me identifying exactly which lines, and also any
changes that you would like to make in the Bill.

But again, thank you for the commitment because we
know how important reading is. And I heard a quote
recently by Frederick Douglass that says, once you
learn to read, you're forever free. And that's what
we want our children to be, we want them to be free
enough to make choices in this world, to be
successful, rather than the choices, whether them
not having the choices as to what they want to be
and being forced into prisons, as opposed to
colleges and technical trades.

So I really appreciate your commitment and your
team's commitment to partner with the Black and
Puerto Rican Caucus as well as the other partners in
this Bill to make sure that our children are
successful and that they're able to read.

What I would like to do at so point is us address
the children being retained at the third grade if
they cannot read, so that we -- they can receive
some intensive intervention. So that's something I

would like to have a conversation with you down the road at some point. So thank you, Mr. Chair, and again, Commissioner, I want to thank you and your team for wanting to take this charge. Thank you.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you. Thank you, Senator, and I would just like to say thank you for your steadfast commitment and leadership with the caucus and I can give you the assurance here at the agency that we truly are excited and committed, we have a moment here, and especially I know Senator McCrory mentioned with some resources that we have to make sure that we do right by our kids and we're open to our part, we've got great partners in the state that needs to be a part of this work with us, with us taking the lead. We're excited about the opportunities for our kids and to continue that work with you also. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairs. Good morning, Commissioner, I just -- and if I need to talk about it offline, I'm sure Senator McCrory will tell me, but I was curious in regards to the requirement in that in achieving -- students achieving the 25 credits required. Is there a literacy and reading, writing and mathematics, a -- at least an eighth grade level in regards to the graduation requirement?

CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So Representative, we will -- and I know Laura is on, we'll take a look at that with your question that you are asking for what specifically the graduation requirements are across the board, is that the basic question?

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Yeah, and getting the 25 credits that our students are required to have, I haven't seen any requirement in regards to the literacy level being at least an eighth grade level for those

three hardcore subjects. And I'm wondering if that's something that we should press on, not only have I heard from constituents in New London but Waterford and Stonington in regards to it during some discussions, so I wanted to check on that. If it's not a requirement that they have that eighth grade level, that we look at that sooner than later.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So graduation requirements, while we have the numbers to achieve but are locally determined, and so let me have a Ajit Gopalakrishnan just say more about that with the requirements.

AJIT GOPALAKRISHNAN: Oh, thank you, Commissioner. The part that in terms of the basic skills competency attainment for graduation, there is existing statute that expects districts to have a standard that allows students to reflect some -- a minimum level of basic skills competency. And it's an older legislation that's still in play, and it expects also the use of the high school state assessment as part of that determination, though it does not prescribe a cut score or an achievement level. It does say that each district should have a basic skills competency attainment standard toward high school graduation.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Okay, is there the possibility that you can help put together some language that requires at least eighth grade level of literacy when our students graduate because we're not doing our students any services if we don't require a standard that is actually elevated to a literacy level where they would be able to succeed after graduation with those requirements. I'm hoping we can push some legislation at another time that requires at least an eighth grade level, if not higher in regard to the graduation credit requirement.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So thank you, Representative. I'm going to have Laura reach out

to you so we can have some more focused conversation in this area. If that's amenable to you, I think that would work well.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Bobby, who's next? We have another hand?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No -- Oh, oh, Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, I wanted to ask you about the reading Bill 6620, I don't see any language in there that would allow possibly, you know, approved or certain categories of volunteers to come in to read because being read to aloud, I wonder if you had a thought on that but the research I've read and my own experience is that reading aloud to children, even into the later grades is incredibly valuable.

Would we be open to having volunteers come in and be --helped to execute the new curriculum on reading and could we include language that allows the schools to do that? Especially during COVID, I think we saw that, you know, sometimes our staff, the teaching staff can be overstretched, and maybe there's some value in allowing parents to come in to read.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: So thank you, Representative, for that question. And I -- let me think about the need for partnerships not, you know, not only -- and that's something that happens now that we've worked on is that schools are partnering, their mentors in some situations that are a part of that, and so that I'm not sure that we need to legislate necessarily that, but we can speak more about how do we ramp up partnerships that's necessary to make sure students, not just when they're in the schoolhouse doors, right, that this

culture of reading assisting families is something that we can work with that will be supporting our students. And -- but certainly very open to have further conversations with you in terms of what currently is allowed, what's what, and what's currently happening in our districts, and where there best practices that we can also share.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Yeah, that would be wonderful. Thank you, Commissioner.

DESI NESMITH: Commissioner, I'd also could add to that, you know, there's not anything that precludes that. In fact, the opposite, we know a lot of our districts and schools right now are bringing in volunteers. I know from personal experience the value in having folks come into a building with a specific purpose around reading to help students at all different levels, and so I know Senator McCrory has been into my former buildings a number of times on things like this. So not only do we understand the importance, but we also have quite a few of our schools and districts that are doing this, and so it's important that we share those best practices and who's doing it aligned to what the needs are of their students.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Welander.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Dr. Russell-Tucker. I wanted to just share some concerns that have been brought up to me by educators in my district. They are thrilled with the level of attention towards literacy, this is specifically about 6620, and making sure that our

kids have the best opportunities for literacy success.

But they are concerned about the new center for literacy research and reading success not being housed within SDE, and I was wondering if you could speak to two parts of that and wondering specifically about is there anything that currently exists in the State Department of Education that would support these efforts, whether it's in the process of creating the center or if -- just to make sure we're taking these steps forward that could address some of the concerns about literacy enrichment, specifically, about adding more reading consultants and reading specialists within our schools so we cannot wait to take these important steps forward.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you, Representative, so just let me rephrase. I think what you're saying is that you have districts who would like to make sure that that center is within SDE?

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Yes.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Okay, so thank you, and I know -- I don't know if Representative Miller is still on but we just had that conversation as -- we've talked about that for all the reasons that I've mentioned in the testimony as to why we think that's a win for us to be able to do that, along with our partners, so certainly not separated from our partners. And those are the kinds of things that allows us with the center here at the SDE to bring to bear all our existing additional supports that we have available to us in order to make sure that this happens, and that we get the outcomes that we are indeed working towards.

So I hear that Representative Miller has asked us to take a look at the Bill and send any revised language that we need to send over so that we can

make sure that we have the center located within the agency. We talked about resource, resourcing that appropriately, and we'll make sure that that's a part of what we continue to have conversations about.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Okay. Great. Thank you so much, I appreciate that. It's an exciting idea and partnership moving forward.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other hands are up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I have one just for clarification, Commissioner. Did I hear you say that the financial literacy can be used to fulfill a stem requirement, is that accurate? Financial literacy course could fulfill a stem requirement?

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: And I'm looking for Irene to make sure -- our Representative is appropriately on Melissa for answering that question.

IRENE PARISI: Yes, thank you, yes, that is correct.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, thank you. All right, seeing no more hands up, I will thank you Commissioner and your staff for test -- you're coming in and answering these tough questions from this Education Committee, appreciate your services and look forward to working with you and fine tuning some of these Bills that we would like to move out of Committee, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Wait a minute.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Wait, we do. Wait.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Exum just put her hand up.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Good morning. I'm sorry, it took me a second to find my -- I still couldn't find -- Just before you take off, good morning, and thank you so much for the presentation. And I have one question, and I do also would like to say that I am so glad that it has been taken -- being taken under consideration to have SDE have this literacy center housed within SDE for -- you stated, I definitely support that.

But I also had a constituent reach out to me very concerned when looking at the areas that will be focused for reading and noting that comprehension was pulled out, and it looks as if fluency is replaced there as one of the five areas of reading, and the concern was that in order to be -- you can be fluent and still not comprehend and looking at whether or not comprehension should continue to stand out as an area of focus.

So I just wanted to bring -- and that's around lines 177 through 179 of the Bill, and I was just interested in getting your response to that. And if you'd like to respond to it later, that's fine as well, but I'm really interested in at least expressing that.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: All right, and thank you, Representative, and we'll take a look at that as well.

The beauty of the center is you can - I'm making -- continue to make the plug. But the idea is that the partners will include our districts and constituents, right, so they'll have a voice, right, as we're looking at the science, right, the science of reading and leading with that, but we do have there -- certainly are there the ability to have these conversations and answer questions so they can

be joint education around all these issues as well, and so we value the ability to do that.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Absolutely. Thank you so much.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: You're welcome.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Thank you, Mr. speaker.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): That's it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I think you're fine, Commissioner, thank you and thank your staff.

COMMR. CHARLENE RUSSELL-TUCKER: Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next up --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So, next up -- Doug, I think we still have 15 minutes to go for public, I mean, for officials, so we have State Treasurer Shawn Wooden. I don't know if he's on. But we can always come back to him if he's not.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, if not --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see him, so maybe we'll move on to Kosta Diamantis.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): From DIS and OPM.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Is Kosta's there?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I see him there.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: So, can you hear me now?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah, we can't see you though.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: I'd love for you to see me if I knew how. Hold on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): It's called a camera.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: You sure we have one? There we go.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): There you go.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There we go, we see you now.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: You know, this remote world is not my world. [laughter] Thank you for having me here today, obviously I'm here to testify on behalf of House Bill 6617.

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. I'm Kosta Diamantis, I'm the Deputy Secretary of OPM, as well as the Director of the Office of School Construction Grants Review and Audit. And I -- there are members of my team here, as always, and specifically, at this point, Section 1 of House Bill 6617, AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS, REVISIONS TO SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND STATUTES.

Its proposed the school construction priority list each year, it's reviewed by the Department of Administrative Services and approved by the School Construction Priority List Review Committee, as you know, it's already sent to the Governor as well, who gets to preview it and submitted with any suggestions from his part, which has not occurred to this point.

It consists of 15 school projects, including ten elementary schools, a middle school, three high

schools, one special ED school. Of the 15, five are new school projects, six are renovation, two are categorized as extension and alteration projects, one is for special education, and one is a vo-ag equipment request.

I would note that the office of School Construction Grants Review and Audit is recommending vo-ag equipment be classified as non-priority projects this session if it's within your where for all to do so going forward in order to facilitate faster approval of these projects so that schools don't have to wait for equipment for an entire year and a half. Especially, if they're in need to promote their various curriculums.

This proposed priority list has estimated a total cost of \$637,710,083 dollars if the legislature and the Governor approve House Bill 6617, that would state the state's maximum grants amount of these projects at \$392,874,668 dollars.

In addition, there's one reauthorization with an estimated project cost of 112,329 -- \$112,329,500 dollars any potential grants for that project of additional \$32 million dollars. We, as you know, have tried to stay under that 400 self-imposed and having an organized amount of projects coming through each year.

Just as in the past, I would note that the maximum total grant amount is the upper limit in the state grants support for these school construction projects. The Office of School Construction Grants Review and Audit conducts expenses review of the school construction projects, preliminary meetings are often held with the grant applicants well before the application is submitted enabling us to present you with true cost of project construction work.

We will continue to work with the school districts, who have proposed projects on the priority list. The additional reviews may lead to reduced total

project cost and grant commitments so that the true cost may be lower than the authorized maximum amount.

And again, we don't spend up to the grant commitment, we only spend what we need, and we don't go beyond that. We look forward to working with you on your continuing to work for delivering modern school facilities that support the high quality of education that Connecticut children need in a cost effective manner. And thank you very much for this opportunity, and certainly I'll answer any questions you may have.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Deputy Commissioner. One question I had, and I just wanted to get your opinion on that on Section 3 of the Bill where it talks about the reestablishment of the building project Committee, do you have any concerns with that section or any opinion?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: On my perspective, I worked with a school district in total, as you know, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and others. I don't care who I work within a district, I'm interested in working in a bipartisan fashion with everybody to get the building done.

As to who creates the building Committee, as long as the building Committee is comprised of people that understand construction is of the most interest that I have. So I don't have a position on that Bill at all, it is certainly one that the -- in the legislators wisdom to decide how they wish to proceed.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, thank you for that answer. And I think that was the only question I had. I do see Representative McCarty has a question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and very quickly, good morning, Kosta, nice to see you today.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Good morning. Good to see you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you. If you would just for the benefit of the Committee may -- and give you the opportunity to just say what your department has done in the last few years to keep the school construction costs down, give you that opportunity to say that, and then if you would give your opinion, I know it doesn't deal with this construction list but going forward we did have in the proposal some language going out in the years out to look at water bottle filling stations in new construction projects, and wondered if you had an opinion on that.

We hear, you know, with some of the schools to keep the students hydrated throughout the day and we think that it may be a good proposal, so if you could just give those comments, I'd appreciate it.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Certainly, let me start with the first one that I think is quite important, and that is the idea of filling stations. I think it's an important thing to do. I think it's advisable, there are many school districts who don't have portable water.

This would certainly somehow solve the problem, I would hope, I'm just not sure how it would work in those particular districts that have water issues to begin with. But where we don't have water issues, I think it's a great idea and certainly would not add a significant enough cost that it would make -- create a problem for us in school construction or increase the cost, and if it did, it would be a worthy way to increase the cost, but I don't see that as happening.

As far as school construction and things that we've done throughout the six years now that I've been handling, it is redesigning school construction and working in partnership with school districts to in fact know where it is they want to go over the course of the next eight to ten years.

So if we are asking school districts for enrollment numbers that say eight years or more, and we like to look at ten years going out and we'd like to look at the previous four years, then we'd like to work with districts looking at the totality of the district and looking at it holistically, and by doing so we know and we can anticipate what the next schools are that are going to be coming down the pipe so that we can of course be more informed as it comes to bonding. So that what our particular needs are going to be.

And also to ensure that we spread the wealth throughout the state of where those particular needs are because it could very well come at some point where the priority list will truly be a priority list with priority projects if we're going to stay within a particular dollar amount, and we're not funding 600, \$800 million dollars a year in school construction projects. And I'm not talking total project cost, I'm talking grant commitment, which is different.

So by working with the towns and knowing where their projects are, what their needs are, we can help the town's avoid ineligible costs, which nobody likes, and make sure the project fits within our parameters of Chapter 10 and give them the biggest bang for their buck and work with them.

We have done other things, the legislature has been very supportive of school based health clinics. They have been supportive of family resource centers. We try to minimize the impact of having those within the schools and costing those towns funds for those. We can't on the one hand, say we

want school based health clinics, and on the other hand say it's impeding them with respect to a space standard where they are then penalized for it.

So we've worked with towns in the best interest of the state to help reduce some of those costs and work with them to be able to do that, and I'm going to close off on that particular subject by saying this, the only other entity in any town that is used more than highways and byways is a school, which is why when I was part of the National Council of School Facilities I've advocated for school funding structure, facilities, maintenance be part of the federal infrastructure Bill, which I'm hoping this year that happens. So that's my pitch on that.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well, thank you very much, I appreciate your comments, Kosta. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Haines.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate having the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you so much, Kosta, for being here.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Sure.

REP. HAINES (34TH): I do have some questions in regards to just what Representative McCarty had asked you in regards to how you come up with your priorities. I'm aware of a survey that was done of all the schools in the State of Connecticut back in 2013, there hasn't been an updated assessment of the schools in our state since then, and I'm just wondering if is that something that is on the docket to be done soon? And the reason I ask that question is just for the simple fact of, I think what the COVID pandemic has shown us is that there are new priorities and new things we have to look at in our school buildings.

One being ventilation, one being heat and air conditioning, and just the regular conditions of the schools. I don't know if this is something that we're looking at in the priority list or as we prioritize schools. I know a lot of schools in our cities are have -- you know, have problems such as ventilation and, you know, we have students that are sick and teachers that are sick because of it, and not only COVID but other things as well.

So I'm just wondering if our priority list has changed a little bit due to the fact that what we've learned of what these pandemics do and how important ventilation is, and I like the idea of the drinking water as well, but I'll let it go with there and see if you can enlighten us on that subject, thank you.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Sure. Let me see, let me start with your first part, and I believe that was a survey. You're correct, the survey ended in 2013, it was legislation that allowed us to create a new survey because that survey was faulty. It didn't provide adequate information, it was never kept up to date. Schools had a difficulty answering some of those questions, and they didn't ask personal -- pertinent questions that would get to the issues that we needed to get to so we can work with the very school districts.

As a result, we created and partnered with a -- Dude Solutions to create a new survey, which is out in the field now. The legislation required that we get it out in the field by July. I believe it's July of 2021. We've been working on it feverishly to get it done, we did it. Just to give you an idea, the reason we used Dude Solutions is we found that 80% of the school districts use Dude's themselves in order to do their regular maintenance and capital reviews.

So it made sense for us to use the system that the school systems were using, versus creating something new and having them to adapt to us. So we got a

system to work with them, and I know Dude has now changed, they've sold to someone else. But the bottom line is we're using the same entity and the same information.

They're updating it now as we're speaking, and we're hoping that they have it all submitted on/or before June, which is what our request has been so that we can actually provide that survey to everybody and have it in real time.

The other addition of using this particular survey is as they're going through their schools and each and every city that is looking at their capital plan and maintenance plan, they should be able to update it live to us. So rather than doing it every five years, it is our hope they do it every year so we know exactly in real time how the schools are maintaining the buildings that we've invested a great deal of money in. And so you'll see that survey coming out hopefully this summer with real accurate information that I know everybody's waiting for.

Let me see, so the HVAC. HVAC has always been an important part when we're building new schools now and doing renovation projects, the HVAC system is, of course, a key component of any building. It actually determines the life of a building. It is the internal control. So our buildings function and last longer if, in fact, the heating and air conditioning systems are not only state of the art but, more importantly, maintained.

Now and as you may realize that in the school priority list, we build the schools. We'll spend from 30 million to 150 million. Then it is our expectations that after we invest those funds in each community, they will maintain those systems, including those HVAC systems that you're speaking of. And towns will do what is necessary to monitor them. And, by the way, if you've ever walked into one of those systems, and one of the -- of a new

school. It looks like it is actually managing an aircraft carrier. The stuff is high tech, it functions superbly, its state of the art in every school that we do, and unfortunately sometimes, it is beyond the experience of some of the people that in the older systems were able to maintain those older systems and need to be retrained, which of course we allow to be part of the process when we're building these new schools now.

So from a new school perspective, from a renovation perspective, HVAC is exceedingly important. We put in the state of the art programs for systems for all the schools. If you're asking me about those schools, they're not -- we're not building new and then are renovated, there is no statutory authority for us to merely do a heating and air conditioning system in a school. There's some good reason to that in the legislature's wisdom in the past, and that is, it is very difficult to merely say I'm going to buy you a new boiler or a new chiller. And oftentimes you need to get to the ventilation system throughout the ductwork and redo that, depending on how that system is done.

That means you're opening up walls, when you're opening up walls, you're also opening up yourself to other pandora's box, which is -- could be PCBs, could be asbestos, and before you know it, your heating and air conditioning system is now turned into a renovation project, which a school district may not anticipated. And what you thought was going to be a \$10 million dollar HVAC system cost, turns into a \$30 million dollar renovation costs.

So there are complexities with nearly signaling out the HVAC system. Having said that, this is again from a construction perspective and the head of -- as the director of school construction. For me, it is a very frustrating thing to know that we manage very tightly the bonding money state taxpayer money that we invest in the communities, and those systems need to be maintained, and they are often not. And

the failure of those systems are not because the systems are old, in most cases, but it's because they haven't been maintained along the way. It is no different than if you don't change the oil in your car, and you keep running ugly oil in your car, eventually the engine will seize and rather than a \$60 dollar oil change you're going to have a \$4,000 dollar engine change.

The HVAC systems in your schools operate and function exactly the same way. If you're not maintaining them to their potential, then you're going to run into other problems. We didn't see those problems until COVID, then HVAC systems became the new Big MAC or whatever the new flavor of the month is. Those were problems that existed before they were exacerbated by COVID-19. And the systems that are in school can deal with them, we just need to maintain them.

Now, if there's a facilities and maintenance program that one would like to consider, that's a different story. As you know, the Governor has been very supportive of the Alliance grant that goes to the 32 distressing -- 32 Alliance Districts, school districts. It's \$30 million dollars. Some receive up to two and a half million, the larger five. And the smaller will receive in the neighborhood, I believe, up 550 million that he is done for that purpose, that they can use for HVAC systems, and so on so forth. But again, it's not state wide, it is the first 32, I believe, it's 32 districts in the Alliance District now. So hopefully that answers your question.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, it does. It obviously opens up, as you mentioned, pandoras box, as far as other things that we see and how to best tackle those without having the schools on the priority list for, as you're suggesting, rebuilds due to the fact that these schools are filled with all kinds of problems and as you start opening walls and ventilation systems.

I wonder if there's maybe this survey that you're talking about that will be out this summer will, you know, align ourselves. One in school -- in particular that I heard recently about was Cross school in the Bridgeport. I'm not even sure if they're on the priority list at this point, but I do believe that they need some attention down there, so I appreciate your answers. Thank you so much, and I thank you for being here today.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Kosta.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Good morning.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Just you -- First, thanks for -- thanks to Representative Haines for bringing up that survey. In regards to the survey, when it goes out and goes to all school districts, and who is the overseer of that in the districts, do you know?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: It is out in districts now. We -- our communication is always the head of the LEA, which is a superintendent.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Okay.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: My guess is the superintendent will probably send it to the facilities director to fill it out and it's an RPM web site that we use in construction services now. So that's where it sits, and that's how I'm guessing it's going to get filled out.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): So it's only filled out by school staff, it doesn't have any school parent leadership groups or anything that have to chime in, or that a decision made by the superintendent?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: It's a decision made by the superintendent, but I would assume it wouldn't involve parents or anyone. It would involve the technicians who can assess the condition of a roof or a heating system or when -- whatever the facilities are, it would be technical in nature.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Oh, and as far as the HVAC systems for a lot of our schools, as we know it, if a school is over 25 years old, then they probably need some kind of adjustment to their HVAC system, usually --

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Right, and, as you know, our renovation statutes allow for school district at 20 years, which is why it's a 20 year life statute that says you can come back in 20 years for a renovation of your school building.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): And what is the percentage of schools that have done that in the last ten years, would you know that?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Lett's see. I would know how many in the last -- yeah, I could probably go back and get the information. I certainly will submit it to you. I can only suggest to you, I recently saw a survey of the number of schools that had suggested they were pre-PCBs, which was 1979

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Yeah.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: And of those, I noticed we had done 80% of those have been renovated and/or rebuilt. So we are moving pretty quickly and orderly, certainly, in these last six years to deal with those school projects that need to go and rock and roll forward. So we've been addressing as many as we can. Of 1187 schools, I think we're at the halfway point.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Okay, and could you send us an update or like an excel sheet to show --

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Sure, absolutely.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): -- the schools that have done it. And, lastly, money for Alliance Districts and you talked about the Governor set aside 500 million for -- was it for Alliance District, HVAC systems or what was that?

REP. NOLAN (39TH): No, it was actually 30 million was the Alliance grant. Alliance District grant for HVAC systems for the Alliance Districts, that the Governor and Secretary McCaw had placed on the bond agenda and actually gets distributed through us at school construction, and that those funds went out -- I've lost track of time because of COVID. Let's say a few three months ago, so they should have those funds in their hands now.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Okay, and if you're able to send out some informative sheet on the schools that receive that.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Yes, sir.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Those are --

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Yes, sir. It's actually statutory as well, and I'll get it -- I'll get that out to you certainly with the list.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): All right. Thank you, sir. And we appreciate the work that you do, and I hope to talk to you offline sometime

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Anytime

REP. NOLAN (39TH): All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative for Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.
Nice to meet you, Mr. Diamantis.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Same here.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): I was told that there was a report done about the -- all the school buildings, maybe ten years ago, sorry if this came up earlier in your other questioning, I had to hop for a second. But is there an update to that report? And I'd love to see it if you could email it to me.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Sure, it did come up earlier.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): I'm sorry.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: And I'll repeat what -- so you have the same information. It was stopped in 2013 because it was ineffective and it was not complete and legislature gave us permission to get a new one and develop a new one, we did so. We finished that, it's on the school districts now, we're hoping that all the school districts will have it responded by June and filled it out completely, and we're hoping that we can disseminate that information sometime this summer in July

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Okay. I apologize. Thanks so much.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Not at all. Not at all.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you, sir, and thank you Mr. Diamantis for your work. I'm just curious about the amounts approved by -- in Bill 6617 for school

William High school, and, as you know, there's been a new allocation provided under the 6617, was a meeting between your offices and Lindon High. And I just wondered of the 112 million that was just authorized, is that pursuant to the 80% reimbursement that was rated?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Yeah, you came in and out. I think what you're asking me is the \$112 million dollars for that particular project under the same reimbursement rate.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Yeah.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Then the answer would be yes.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Okay, so that said, the reimbursement rate is not the actual 112 million. I just want to be clear.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Yes.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): And --

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Total project cost and grant commitment, of course. We list the total project cost and then the grant commitment.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Okay, so the grant commitment really isn't in there at this point.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: What the grant commitment on that particular -- unfortunately, I have to put my glasses on, Representative. Senator McCrory has made my vision go bad with the things he sends me to read. [laughter] Total project cost.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Yeah.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: We look at 96 million. Let's see. Total estimate. Let me see if I can do the quick math. The difference is -- yeah, the

reauthorization is for \$89 million dollars in the grant.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Okay, great, I just wanted to be clear because I'm looking at this and I'm thinking, I know you're not going to give us a whole 112 because that's what we had authorized.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: That is correct. The total project cost is 112, our piece of it at 79.64%, which is the reimbursement rate, it brings it to 89.41.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Excellent. Thank you. Thanks so much for your work, everything you're doing here is very much appreciated. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Do we have any other questions? I have --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No more hands.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I have a question for Kosta. Kosta, over the past ten years, how much would you estimate the state has spent in school construction and remodeling over the past ten years would you say?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Let's see, we're probably talking about, from our grant perspective, somewhere in the tune of four and a half, five million.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Billion you mean?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Billion. Billion.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Billion

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, so -- and as I mentioned to anybody who would listen, I've always talked about equity, and how do we make things a little more equitable for all tax payers in State of Connecticut. Those are very good jobs, correct?

You would say these construction jobs, building these schools, they're very well paying jobs, would you say that's accurate, Kosta?

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: They're great jobs. As a matter of fact, for the first time because of the speed and the work of the MLK project, Martin Luther King project, we actually put a plaque in thanking all of the subs that are in that job because everybody always hears who the CMs are. And -- but nobody hears about all the trades that are in there to get that job done, and there's a hundred of them. And so they're all going to be listed and they're all good companies, hardworking folk who come in there and get that job done seven days a week.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Right, so I -- and you know as well as I know, and I will talk offline that I have a lot of concerns around contracting and who gets access and resources and contracts to build and spend \$4 billion dollars. And we can -- I think we as a state, we need to do a better job because we're going to continue to spend billions of dollars every year, but I don't think we're doing it in a way that is equitable for everyone. So I don't think in this particular piece of legislation, we can do anything but I'd like to continue our conversation offline because I think in 2021 and as we move forward, we have to do a better job providing opportunities to all people.

So that's just my commentary. I just want to add, especially if we're spending these dollars every year, every year. We got to get better results.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: You -- of course, you and I have discussed this, we continue to discuss and work out a plan. You know, I'm supportive of the idea and the premise, and I agree with you wholeheartedly, and I think we've got some ideas to how we can make it go forward. As you know, the disparity study that's going forward is also going to be helpful. It'll identify some shortcomings in some of the

workforce issues in the other areas, educational areas, and I think if we pull it all together, Senator, we can come up with some good stuff.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I appreciate your commentary, you're absolutely right because we always talk about -- and I don't need -- we always talk about jobs in Connecticut. Like bring this industry here because we want jobs, jobs, I hear it all the time, we need jobs, jobs. And my question is, jobs for who? Who are we preparing for these jobs and the opportunities? And I don't think we do a good job of explaining that. So again, thank you for your commentary, thank you for your testimony, thank you for coming forward, we'll be in touch and that's it.

KOSTA DIAMANTIS: Thank you, sir.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Next up --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Doug, we do have on Senator Osten who's our last public official on the agenda, who's been waiting patiently. Can we have her go on and then move on to the public because we have already spent an hour and 15 minutes on our public officials?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, so she's the last one?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): She would be the last and Treasurer Wooden would probably come on later because he had another meeting at 10:30

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, great.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay, so Senator Osten, we're going to have you come on. Hi, Senator.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Hi, how are you? Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. And by the importance of this subject, I have put in some 70 Bills and I've

submitted testimony on many of them, but this is the only Bill that I'm speaking on in person about.

This Bill that I'm speaking on today is your House Bill No. 6619. As you know, I put in -- proposed Senate Bill No. 249, which was AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM, and you've been kind enough to incorporate the language into this Bill in order for us to keep down on the number of Bills that we have in front of us. And why do I think that this is so important? I was hoping that Chief Velky would be here today with me, he is having technical difficulties, and I'm hoping that you get to hear from him later on. He is the Chief of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, which is on the other side of the state.

And many people think that the only thing that Native Americans have in the State of Connecticut is the gaming industry, which is absolutely not true. Native Americans in the State of Connecticut right now we have five state recognized tribal nations, recognized for their longevity here in the state, their longevity here in the state predates the formation of the State of Connecticut.

I want to say that while the state recognizes five tribal nations, the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation, the Mohegan tribe, the Eastern Pequot tribal nation, the Golden Hill Paugussett tribal nation, the Schaghticoke tribal nation, all of them were here before the State of Connecticut was here.

Quite frankly, why do I think it's important? Well every year we have the holiday of Thanksgiving and many people talk about the first Thanksgiving as being the time when the Europeans came to this country and settled in here. We think that there was holidays and rituals that were already happening, but annually, the Mashantucket tribal nation holds the feast of the green corn and dance

known as the Schemitzun, and I probably said the name wrong.

And that is -- that was Thanksgiving. That was a celebration of the harvest and that's what Thanksgiving was truly about. We also have made clear mistakes here in the state relative to the tribal nations, and I point out for the Schaghticoke in particular here today that many years ago, the general assembly approved a hydro plant around Kent Connecticut and the impoundment of the water that came up from the construction of that dam and the hydro plant flooded the historical burial ground of the Schaghticoke tribal nation, there are bodies still underneath that water.

I'd put in another Bill that is relative to building a retaining wall to pull the waters off of that burial ground to -- in today's world we would not allow the flooding of a burial ground. And I've seen the pictures of them attempting to remove some of the bodies before the land was flooded, they were only given a couple of weeks to do so.

I also talked a little bit about the fact that students that are of Native American ancestry go to classes that completely disregards the fact that when the Europeans came here, we already had a living, breathing community that had religion and nations and rules and governments, and we act as if we developed that when we came in, but truth be told, all of those were still here before that ever happened. I believe that we really need, and I have rather lengthy testimony and I'm highlighting certain components of it, but even in the capitol building we have historical statues around the building.

We honor John Mason, who was the architect of the massacre of the Pequots. He oversaw and participated in the slaughter and burning of whole villages revolving around the Pequots. I think that his statue should come down and be placed in a

museum with a context that is true to the history of that particular situation.

I could talk forever on the issues of the Native Americans in Connecticut. I'm asking for parody for them so that we can actually recognize the history that they were there. And at that same time of the Pequot massacre, we had a river that ran through Eastern Connecticut. It was the Pequot river, the Pequot River is now known as the Thames River. We changed the name after we burned and slaughtered the Pequots, we should know that. Thank you, would be happy to answer any questions

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I think we have -- I think we have Senator Berthel, has a hand raised.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning. First of all, I apologize for my delay. I had a -- Senator McCrory, you and I were in the same meeting a few moments ago, so thank you for indulging me. Senator Osten, thank you for your testimony and continued support of the Native Americans with which we share the great State of Connecticut. And I was a proud co-sponsor of your Bill, Senate Bill 249. You know, and I think that you appreciate and understand the challenges that the Committee had this year with respect to lots of curriculum mandates coming up against what this Committee knows was our higher priority at the moment and addressing COVID related responses to our public education system. Making sure that we're addressing safety and assessments and understanding where we really are with the education of our children.

So I think that the Committee Bill, HB 6619 is a good step in the right direction right now for the Committee but I guess I would ask you this, if there was a -- if there was an opportunity for the Committee to perhaps look at carving out the Native American studies curriculum for next session, you know, assuming that we move 6619 forward, and again

we move -- we did that because we wanted to acknowledge all of the curriculum requests that we had this year, and there were quite a few. But, you know, last year right before we shut the building down, our very last public hearing for the Education Committee actually heard Members of the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation. They performed a drum ceremony outside of the legislative office building, right after they testified, and I think the Bill was ready to go last year.

And again we're up against challenges this year because of COVID and all the things that we have to address as a Committee and as legislature to ensure the, you know, the forward movement of our education system and everything that's been placed upon us in the last 12 months. But do you think that there -- would it be -- I guess what I'm asking you Senator is if we were able to find a way to carve out consideration for the curriculum piece for Native American Indians in the coming session, is that something that you think might be amenable to the tribes that you represent?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, thank you very much for that, Senator.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Senator Osten, Senator Osten. Can I just interrupt for a minute? Sorry Senator Berthel. But I just wanted to mention that Chief Velky --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): I just saw him, yes.
[laughter]

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So I don't know if you want him to come on now, and he can, I guess, answer some questions along with you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): That would be great, that would be great, and I'll answer Senator Berthel's question and then if the Chief -- there you go Chief. It's nice to see you here today, Chief. So

keep yourself unmuted because I'm going to answer this question and then if you could just say a few words, I really appreciate you being here Chief.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, first of all, Senator Berthel, I would -- I want to get this passed, and I'm afraid that if we put it off for another time frame, what I've been told by some people is that the Native Americans should sit down and wait their turn. And that is so offensive to me because they've sat down for -- before the State of Connecticut was the state, and I don't know when their turn will be. And I'm concerned that if we put it off for another year, that it will not get heard again, that we will make a promise that it will happen, and then it just won't happen.

So whatever we can do to get this past in the current year, I think is important because this community has in many ways been given short shrift on a lot of different issues always telling them they'll be back to them. And that would be my very big concern if we don't do something, then we get nothing. And Chief Velky is here, and he is -- and for who I represent, I represent both the Mashantucket's and the Mohegans, both the reservations are in my district.

I have been to the reservations, I have gone out to Chief Velky's reservation because I decided that if I was going to represent the Native Americans that reside in the State of Connecticut, I had to hear from them. And every piece of legislation I have put in revolving around Native Americans, I have heard from the representatives, the Chiefs, and the leaders of those respective tribes, and brought forth what they thought was important, not what I thought was important. And I just wanted to say that and Chief Velky is here now, I'd like to have him speak. Chief, thank you for coming.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you, Senator Osten, and thank you Committee for having me. For the record and the transcript, my name is Richard Velky, I'm the Chief of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation of Connecticut. The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation has been recognized, first by the colony of Connecticut in 1736, and post-revolutionary war, the State and General Assembly continuous to this day. Our reservation was granted in 1752, but our historical ties in Western Connecticut and East in New York reach well back into the 1600s.

And having said that, I'll go off of my statement here. I would go full support in what you just said Senate Osten because just to continue this again for another session would just be denying the facts and help that the Indigenous people here in the State of Connecticut need.

Senator, what you're doing is standing and all the tribes appreciate it. I wanted to share some of my upbringing also. I along with six siblings grew up in Bridgeport, my mother Katherine Princess Mutaka was a Schaghticoke. We would have been raised in Kent, however, the state first through Parks And Forest Commission, Welfare Commission and the Department of Environmental Protection established regulations prohibiting tribal members from residing on our land. The irony is that until 1972 Connecticut did not recognize any members of the five Indigenous tribes as citizens. Technically, unless we rejected our heritage, we had no rights granted to others in this constitutional state.

Growing up as children -- I don't know if I was I dropped.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): No, go ahead. Chief, you're on there.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you, growing up as children do, as in the 1950s, my friends and I would play cowboys and Indians. At first, I did not want

to be an Indian, nobody did. Television portrayed Indians as savages, and those shown on movies and in the shows the Indians never won, who wanted to be a loser? It was after my mother explained our heritage in history that I began a different stance and proud to play that Indian.

After honorably discharged from the United States Navy in 1971 I became active within our tribe. First, as Chairman of housing authority, then vice Chairman of the tribe, and then elected Chief in 1987. Under provisions of our constitution, I remain positioned for life, provided I do not exceed the authority there granted --

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry. Two and half minutes, if you don't mind summarizing. Thank you.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Very well, Members of the Education Committee and Representatives and Senators and the General Assembly, diversity is now a catch word as so many people and cultures are demanding and being recognized. Ask yourself, why is it that the truth about our first citizens and Native people are no less important? Thank you for allowing me the time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): If I may just follow up very quickly, I know we have a number of people that are in line, and we have a long day.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes we do.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Senator Osten, thank you for your continued advocacy. Chief Velky, very nice to meet you, sadly, it's virtually as opposed to in person. But I think there's one distinct difference between the mandates that we've seen that came before the Committee this year. Some of those mandates were

more topic related as opposed to historical curriculum mandates, and this clearly adding American -- Native American Indian Studies to our curriculum is historical in reference, as opposed to a topic or an idea that someone may be wanting to push forward. So Senator, thank you. Chief, thank you. Mr. Chair, thank you for a couple of extra minutes of indulgence.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Senator Osten and Chief Velky to the Education Committee, it's so nice to see you. And I know Senator Osten this is very important to you, and I really do appreciate very much your advocacy and perseverance. I know we've spoken about this. But I just want to be sure that I understand correctly, are you -- because I have your testimony in front of me, but you are in support of us developing a model curriculum? May I first have that answer, and then I just want to follow up with one comment.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So I've always been in favor of a model curriculum, and that is what everybody has been asking for, but a model curriculum put on hold to some future date does not address the issues that should be already addressed. And that is my concern is that we are being put on the backburner again.

And so I just want to make sure that we are getting this out there that yes, we should -- I don't think we need a day to talk about Native Americans. I don't think we need a week or a month. I've always found that those days or weeks or months don't address the true issues, and that's the incorporation of the diversity that the State of Connecticut has, and the understanding that the things like when we say we have the first

Thanksgiving here, this is what it is, but it wasn't the first Thanksgiving, there was already Thanksgiving happening.

When we don't talk about the history -- and what the Chief is being really kind. The things that have happened to the Native Americans where at time and time again compact after compact, we have avoided and not talked about. These things are not what Connecticut should be of. But Native Americans have continually been put on the backburner and told to wait their turn. I want their turn to be now, that's what I want. So if it's a model curriculum that would incorporate the daily activities that the Native Americans and the things that they have incorporated into our state, I'm for that, yes, but I'm not for being put on the side.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Right, and I very much appreciate those comments Senator Osten. I do want to point out for the benefit of our listeners today, though, that the Connecticut has a social studies framework that already does exist, and I just would like to read this too in grade five, for instance in our early United States history.

Some of the students explore just what you're talking about, they say explore ways that the Indigenous peoples helped the colonies to survive, and the motivations of Indigenous peoples for doing this. Analyze the position of Indigenous peoples in the Connecticut colony.

So if you go throughout our curriculum from the third grade through high school, and I understand exactly what you're saying, and you want to have more specific curriculum. I really appreciate all of the tribes and their willingness to come forward and to work with the Department of Education, I know in speaking with our Chief Rodney Butler they -- I know the tribes have some materials already in place, and I think the department would welcome that

and that we could work to get a model curriculum in place.

But I just wanted to mention that I wouldn't want anyone to leave today not -- thinking that we do try to have these topics at least throughout our curriculum, maybe they're not -- we want to emphasize them more and do a better job, and that's why I think the Education Committee came together taking your proposal and listening very carefully to what you have said and working with the tribes, so that we do get a model curriculum in place.

So I know it's a little bit of a delay. But I was pleased to read today that you were supportive of having a model curriculum and working with the department to get the exact good curriculum in place, so I just wanted to --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So if I --

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): -- comment. Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): If I could just -- thank you very much, Representative McCarty, but I think you're missing my point. When we talk about how the Native Americans helped the colonies survive, that is not telling the Native Americans history, that does not address the issue. The Native Americans have history before they helped the colonies survive, and that is exactly my point is that we are not looking at this in a comprehensive fashion that the Native Americans had cultures and governments and religious activities that happened in and of themselves before the Europeans came here.

Our history is written as if the Europeans came here and the land was empty, the land was not empty, it was filled with a vibrant culture, it was filled with vibrant people, and that is my point on this. And so, when we have that them taught as if they were upholding the colonists, we hold them up, and these are the supporters underneath, we are missing

the point that they were here before us. And that has been our problem, not just in this state but that's been our problem as a country. That we have not recognized that Indigenous people were here and had government and structures that we tried to eliminate.

When the Chief said and I don't want to speak for the Chief, but when the Chief said that they couldn't live on their reservation because they were denied that opportunity by the State of Connecticut, that's a wrong and that's not a wrong that we should accept.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And I agree certainly with those comments. I was just trying to determine if we could put a model curriculum in place so that we would satisfy all of what you have spoken about today and, certainly, I think you have -- you can see that there's a tremendous amount of support to get it right. So thank you very much again, I see you everywhere, and I really do appreciate so much your advocacy, Senator. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Representative McCarty. Representative Johnson. Representative -- Okay.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it, and thank you, Senator Osten for bringing this issue forward and I appreciate everybody in the Education Committee for working on this issue.

Very important issue for us to fully understand how we are evolving into a society that really gets all the horrible things that have occurred all the way through history. And whether it's for Native Americans, our Black Americans, our Puerto Rican, and Hispanic Americans. All of these people are -- have suffered a great deal, and I think it's really important for us to be able to allow with our emotional sensitivity and intellectual capacity to

really understand how we should behave and how we should create a better society.

So with that said, I am wondering exactly how the curriculum would be developed. I know that the Native Americans here in Connecticut have a history museum, they've done a number of things to bring the information forward, and we have utilized the university systems to help us with African American studies and also the Puerto and Hispanic studies. I just wondered just how you envision a curriculum being addressed addressing this kind of, you know, educational opportunity for people.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Well, Chief, I don't know if you want to answer that question.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you, Senator, and there would be a number of ways to open up the curriculum, you know, just Schaghticoke itself upon our -- seeking federal recognition, had over 55,000 pages of documentation, and probably 45,000 of them was on our tribe and our history.

So there is a big story to be told, and Senator is absolutely right when she mentions that we have a, you know, on the Eastern part of the state Mashantucket's, Mohegans have their culture building and over here on my side state, we have in Washington Connecticut the -- Indians gathering there where they have a building, an out building that Senator Dalis was very instrumental and having expand, and Senator - or not Senator, but Governor Ella Grasso was also a big participant in that.

But just having these facilities are not just enough to have them, it's bringing people to them and educating them. And you say education hasn't been that much in the state, and I say look, I have seven grandchildren, I have three children, how nieces and nephews. I don't remember one time them coming home to me or their parents talking about what they learned on Native Americans in Connecticut that day

in school. And it needs to happen, it's way overdue, and they -- our children and even our adults need to be educated on their heritage here in this great State of Connecticut.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Representative -- I think we have next. Representative Nolan, you have your hand --

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Yes, thank you. I want to first thank you, Mr. Chair, thanks Senator Osten for initiating this. I am a co-introducer to this Bill, and it kind of upsets to me that -- of the possibility of a delay in this moving forward.

I know when I was in high school and even elementary school, I really feel like when I was growing up I was -- it was unfair education, which did not tell me about the true facts in regards to the history of Black Americans. And I would hate to continue to watch and see my Native American brothers and sisters go through a time where they're not getting full accuracy and -- in regards to the education of the people -- of their people.

It's just not fair not to move on and push this Bill forward to make sure that we can start something this year so that they can start within the next couple of years. It is just something I think is unacceptable. We should not continue to delay it. It is going in reverse when we do this, so I plead with colleagues to do what we can to push this Bill forward in regards to making sure that truth can be told because truth is not always told in the way that it should be. When it comes to education, there's a lot of falsehoods and there is a narrative that definitely needs to be changed, and it is time to change that narrative now.

So, thank you, Mr. Chair, and again, thank you, Senator Osten. And I look forward to voting for this this year and no -- not delaying it any further.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Thank you very much. I just want to say that I would encourage people to go to Washington Connecticut. Washington Connecticut has an Indian Affairs Institute that said the most profound thing to me that history is told by those who came on the boat, not those that were already on the land. And I think that that's important for us to recognize, they were already here, they already had history, and that to me was the most profound thing that was said to me and I encourage people to go, of course, to the Mashantucket and Mohegan tribal nations museums and see what they have but Washington, the Indian Affairs Institute is very profound also, someplace that people should actually visit.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Representative Nolen. Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I just wanted to also say that as practically a co-introducer of the Bill for Native American studies, but also, I co-sponsored the Bill for Asian Pacific American studies, and what I want to say is I agree with Senator Osten and the other of my colleagues that said there's an urgency to this.

And I think that we stood together last summer in the Senate and talked about needing to look at our Africans here in the legislature through a racial equity lens, and I believe we have to hold true to that, we committed to that, and this has got to be a priority and as serious as the needs of our education system are, having been impacted by COVID, I believe it's just as serious the impact of hate crimes and racial inequity in our society and systemic racism.

And so I really agree that we need to push this Bill forward, and, you know, I want to underscore the

other aspects of this, you know, the events of this week toward Asian Americans in Atlanta, the horrific killings that we've seen. You know, underscore the urgency, the actions that so many of our LGBTQ community have faced, there's an urgency to this, and so any delay to me is really problematic. And so, Senator Osten, I want to thank you for bringing forward this and pushing this Bill, and Chief Velky, I appreciate your comments and the importance of what you brought to this conversation, and so I hope -- I don't really have a question I just I want to associate myself with the good Senators that have spoken to this and hope that we will move it quickly.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So I would like to just talk about one historical aspect that happened just in the last two days. For the first time ever, a Native American woman -- a Native American and a woman also, is the secretary of the Interior, a cabinet Member of the Biden administration.

This is the first time that Native Americans have been given a voice at cabinet level, and I think that that is something that we should really be remembering. This administration in our federal administration is recognizing the importance of Native Americans and the -- what the value they brought here. I point out, Chief Velky is a navy veteran, they have always served our country.

And I think that we need to start giving our due back to these people who were here and had their established governments already. So I just want to point out it's a great honor to see the new secretary of the interior, someone who understands the Native Americans as a Native American woman herself.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you, thank you. Chairman McCrory.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, I think we have one more hand. Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to underscore that there's absolutely nothing that is partisan about this issue. I'm old enough to remember a time when we did learn about the Indigenous history. I went to public school in New York City at PS 117, and I remember in fourth and fifth grades that we studied the Iroquois Indians. And we studied them not just, you know, as helpers and people that joined us on thanksgiving table, we did study their history and their housing and their interactions with, you know, with colonizers.

I don't know when we lost that but, you know, I know that it was inspirational enough that I did my own research as I, you know, as I went through school and went through life. When we relocated to Chicago, you know, we did some hiking and we explored the Alianai history and one of the first things that we did when we relocated to Connecticut 21 years ago was become familiar with the, you know, with the Pequots and the Mohegans and the other tribes looking for recognition that are on our part of the state.

So, you know, instead of being mad about all of this, I just think we need to be positive and understand the importance of that which came before us and, you know, and how our interactions in our society, you know, in many ways, destroyed their society, and let those lessons to be learned.

But I see no reason at all why -- that I won't also you know, be an endorser of this Bill. It's a great time and it's long overdue, so thank you Senator Osten for your tenacious pursuit of this. I know that you've been chasing it for more than just this session, and thank you Chief Velky and, you know, we should just do this now, thank you, sir.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, any other questions, comments for the Committee?
Representative Exum.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a comment, I'd like to first thank Senator Osten and all of the co-introducers, and I would just like to say that I really liked the idea of having this as a part of the model curriculum at a younger age. I think it's so important that we build and know each other very early on so that over the years it's not something that we don't know each other, we won't guess and have our Native American brothers and sisters as caricatures within our schools, as mascots, as an other.

When we build in curriculum and have knowledge from the very early years moving up, and I think this is just a really important opportunity to do with all backgrounds, all cultures as we look at integrating our curriculum in a way that is truly fair and helps us to value and to see each other. Thank you Chief Velky for being here today, and thank you so much for your passion, advocacy and I totally support this legislation, Senator Osten. Thank you so much for this.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, Chief Velky, I don't know if you want to say last couple words and then we're going to get and let the Committee move on to its hundred other people.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: I know your schedule is a very deep also. I just thank you for the opportunity to appear in this. I couldn't agree anymore with the Representatives and Senators that support this Bill moving forward now and no further delays, let's get it done. It's something that we can do, it's not a big project and it should be moving forward, and thank you Senator Osten for being the lead on this. Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, thank you very much, Committee Members and Representative Sanchez and Senator McCrory and the other leaders on the Committee. I appreciate it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Chief.

CHIEF RICHARD VELKY: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Up next, we're going to go to the public, and I believe our first public speaker will be Lillian Bertram, student. Is --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Lillian Bertram

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): She's not here, may we come back to her.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Unless she's in the waiting -- I'm just looking in the waiting room to see if she's -- no, I don't see her in the waiting room.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, we can come back to her. If we move ahead and we might have time to come back to her towards the end. We have Steven Hernandez. Steven.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Good morning. Good morning, can you hear me?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, Steven. You're on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, we can.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Perfect, good morning, everyone. Good morning, esteemed Members of the Education Committee, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, and other Members of the Education

Committee. My name is Steven Hernandez, I'm the Executive Director of the Legislatures Nonpartisan Commission On Women, Children, Seniors Equity And Opportunity. Together with our children and families senior policy fellow or policy fellow Thomas Nuccio we're pleased to submit our testimony today on the following four Bills.

In support of House Bill 6619, on the model curriculum. House Bill 6620 on the right to read, Senate Bill 1033 on including computer science and financial literacy as part of high school graduation requirements, and finally Senate Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Firstly, on the model curriculum, you know, it's important to note, in addition to the testimony that's already been given, that Connecticut is home to five state recognized tribal nations. The Asian and Pacific islander communities are among the fastest growing communities of the state, bringing in diversity of resources, ideas, opportunities and needs to the future of the state. The LGBTQ plus communities of the state face unique challenges and provide powerful opportunities for us to provide support to a community represented by members of your communities that could be your children, parents and other relatives, neighbors, friends, coworkers, employees, and other professionals.

In the spirit of nothing for us without us, in hosting a conversation that it was the beginning of a series of conversation with the five represented tribes, I think it's critically important that the constituencies for which these curricula will be developed to represent are included in the development of those curricula's, so that we get the full story. And that's really what this is about, it's for the people and residents of our state's to be able to see themselves in our curricula.

On a right to read, it is critically important that we double down, triple down our efforts on access to the foundational skill set of literacy in the State of Connecticut. Learn -- understanding how to read, which is very different than loving to read, loving to read is something that happens when you're able to read, is critically important. It is that dividing line between learning to read and reading to learn that we really have to cross in the State of Connecticut. And this isn't just for children who are African American, Latino, although we are disproportionately represented in lack of access to those literacy foundational literacy skills, but it's also for children on the dyslexia spectrum and children who come from communities of modest means

DALLAS EMERLE: Sorry to interrupt, Steven, you're at two and a half minutes. If you wouldn't mind summarizing.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Thank you so much, and finally, on minority teacher recruitment and retention and financial literacy. On teacher retention, it's critically important that students be able to see themselves at the head of the table, at the head of the classroom and also in leadership roles in the profession of teaching. We want more teachers of color and that's one of the most effective ways to attract children of color to the profession.

And then, finally, on financial literacy, it's important that our young people be ready, not just to learn how to pay their Bills but to learn how to be the centers of gravity of their economic success, and that's what financial literacy should mean to us. It should be preparing young people to go into productive life and actually have the tools that they need to build wealth. So that's critically important, I believe, for all of our children.

And, finally, I am eager to take any questions that you may have on either of these proposals.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you Steve, thank you for the work that you have done on the commission. It's been some really good, outstanding work and always looking forward to working with you on. I don't see any hands up, Steve, at the moment. Nope. So thank you, thank you for your testimony, Steve.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we're going to go to Crystal Whipple. Is Crystal Whipple --

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: Here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I see you. Okay, there you go. You have the floor.

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: Thank you. Senators McCrory, Berthel and Abrams and Representative Sanchez, McCarty, and Barry and all of the Honorable Members of the Education Committee. My name is Crystal Whipple and I am honored to appear before you on behalf of the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation, as one of our tribal council members and as the Chairwoman of our Tribal Education Committee.

I'm here today to discuss HB 6619. I want to convey our appreciation to the Committee for including Native American studies as part of this very important Bill. However, we are also respectfully requesting that the Committee take a stronger stance by including language to institute a mandatory comprehensive Native American studies curriculum for Connecticut's public schools.

We applaud the legislature's efforts in 2019 to pass public act 19-12 concerning the inclusion of African American and Black studies and Puerto Rican and Latino studies into the public school curriculum. Similar action is needed to ensure that Connecticut's education system improves the quality of an access to Native American studies in its curriculum.

In 2019 the National Congress of American Indians issued a report that highlighted the need for initiatives like HB 6619. The report attached summarizes the efforts of all 50 states to implement educational content about Indigenous people into K through 12 classrooms, and found that 87% of state history and social studies curriculums included no mention of tribal history after 1900. In fact 27 states had no mention of Native people whatsoever in their K through 12 curriculum.

In Connecticut we are surrounded by Algonquin Indian references. The very word Connecticut being among the most prominent, meaning long title river in Algonquin. Yet, very few of Connecticut's residents, adults and youth alike know from where those names originate, let alone the histories, contributions, and partnerships of tribal nations.

Like you, we see education as a key component to bridging understanding and building a unified community, and that's what we hope will be achieved with passage of legislation that improves the quality of an access to Native American studies curriculum. Without the existence of mandatory comprehensive Native studies curriculum, inappropriate references, inaccuracies, and false assumptions about Indigenous people go largely unchecked.

One such example is a school mascot controversy. Native sports images are often cartoonish and culturally inaccurate, perpetuating false narratives and negative stereotypes of Indigenous people. Sports teams exploit these images at our expense and with little regard for the effects they have on our people, particularly our tribal youth.

The National Congress of American Indians had this to say in their 2013 report on Native mascots, when exposed to these images, the self-esteem of Native youth is harmfully impacted, their self-confidence

erodes and their sense of identity is severely damaged. Specifically, these stereotypes affect how Native youth view the world and their place in history while also affecting how society views Native peoples. This creates an inaccurate portrayal of Native peoples and their contributions to society.

Thankfully, we've observed in recent years many schools throughout Connecticut changing their mascots from Native American themes to representations that more appropriately reflect the beauty diversity and collective strength of their student populations, we hope this trend continues. On a much broader perspective, the prejudices towards Indigenous people continue to be far more deeply rooted within the fabric of American society. In 1963 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King had this to say about it, our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian was an inferior race. We are perhaps the only nation, which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its Indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a novel crusade, indeed even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or to feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films and our folklore all exalted.

It's time to change the narrative about Indigenous people for the better and education is the key solution. As you know, the ancestors of the Members of the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation have resided here since time immemorial, long before the existence of this beautiful state we all call home. And we look forward to the opportunity to tell future generations about the beauty about culture and the complexity of our unique history and legacy, which is what we have done for more than 23 years at our Mashantucket Pequot museum and research center.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I respectfully ask for the

full Committees endorsement of a Native American studies focused curriculum, and the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation stands ready to work with you to assistant in curriculum development. Thank you for your time and consideration.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And thank you for your testimony, Ms. Whipple. We do have some questions. Senator Berthel.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Councilman Whipple, thank you so much for being here this morning and providing your testimony. I think this is very important for the Committee to hear. If I recall correctly, I think I met you about a year ago on the -- at the tribal headquarters in the tribal chamber, as a matter of fact, little over a year ago --

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: Yes.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): -- right before we shut down the world for -- because of COVID. So thank you for being here, I really didn't have a -- I guess I do have a question. I don't know if you're -- you can speak to this, I believe there's someone else from the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation is going to speak as well, but I'm wondering if -- and I know we have a lot of people that are here today to testify, but I'm wondering if you or your colleague can provide information to the Committee regarding what has been done in other states in other tribal nations with respect to curriculum adjustments, mandates, making sure that in other states they're providing the appropriate level of curriculum and attention to Native American studies and other public schools.

And I don't know if you can speak to that or if your colleague is going to speak to that.

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: I know that we have just begun to look at other curriculum. We actually started right

here with the town of Ledyard, so most recently, myself and J. Hartling the superintendent have spoken just as recent as this past Monday morning. And so we're going to sit down and go through a binder of what Ledyard has in its curriculum as far as Native American studies.

I can tell you, having gone through the Ledyard public school system myself and a graduate of Ledyard High School, there's not very much. I have three sons, who one is left to graduate, none of them were exposed to Native American studies through the Ledyard public school system. And so I'm not sure exactly how other states have handled such a mandate but I know that the tribe is more than willing and ready to work with the State of Connecticut and the other tribes in the state to get this done.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Right, great. Thank you. I appreciate your, again, your testimony this morning and I hope that we can we can find a way to address this issue. And, again, thank you for being here. Mr. Chairman, thank you for minutes of indulgence.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Senator.
Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Senator Berthel actually asked some of my question, but I wanted to welcome you Crystal and say it's a pleasure to be working with the Mashantucket Pequot tribes and work closely with them in my region in southeastern Connecticut. But I thought that you did have some curriculum already underway, and that there had been some studies ready to go, and I believe what I've heard is that the department would be more than willing to work with the tribes in developing a model curriculum. So if you could share any of that information, I think it would be most useful.

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: We do have some Pequot specific curriculum that we've worked on, on the reservation. However, we do feel that it's very important that all the tribes of Connecticut take part in the building of the curriculum. We would not want it just to be the Mashantucket story, we think that it needs to be inclusive of all tribes. And so we would be looking to work with all the rest of the tribal nations in the state to build this curriculum.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Oh, and I didn't mean to exclude any of the other tribes, I -- so I appreciate that clarification, but just really, I think, to really get this curriculum into the appropriate way that we want to have -- hear all the voices, so I just wondered at what stage the tribes may be at already helping us develop that curriculum. So I really appreciate seeing you today, and thank you for that input. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you Representative. Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and councilman Crystal Whipple, we are just grateful for you coming before us today to share your testimony and we just want to continue to encourage you to push because we're pushing away along with you. But I think it would be an asset if you can share any little bits of the curriculums from maybe through email and/or scheduled Zoom so that we can have open dialogue in regards to what to share with other members of the community.

Some of the things that need to be highlighted that are not highlighted in the merit that should be recognized. So I appreciate you for being here today and thank you, Mr. Chair. That's about it.

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: Thanks you, we can absolutely share what we've gathered so far.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative, and thank you Ms. Whipple for sharing your testimony and we look forward to either connecting through Zoom or getting an email to learn more about the curriculum that you spoke about. I don't have any more questions here so I'm going to be moving on to your colleague, number 14, Phyllip Thomas.

CRYSTAL WHIPPLE: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Is Phyllip Thomas --

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Can you guys hear me? Sorry, I just --

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you go, we can hear you now.

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Okay. [Foreign language]
Greetings, good morning everybody, well, afternoon now. My name is Seeing Fox, I'd like to start off by thanking the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak today. My English name is Phyllip Thomas and I'm speaking before you today as the Chairman of the Mashantucket Pequot travel Youth Council, concerning House Bill 6619, which discusses the inclusion of Native American studies as a part of a newly established statewide model curriculum.

I'm a Pequot and a Narragansett Native American, and I have a liberal studies degree in political science and economics from Pace university this past May. I grew up in Mashantucket where my people have a child development center but not an elementary school or a high school, so most of our youth attend Ledyard public schools or other schools throughout southeastern Connecticut.

When I reminisce on my experience growing up in Ledyard public schools, it wasn't really the Native American history that I learned, but the lack thereof, despite the fact that all of New London

county was be Pequot land before it was taken from us.

I'm here today to urge the Committee to take a step in the right direction toward the full inclusion of Indigenous people and our views within Connecticut generally, as well as within our public education system. To share an example of our views, Pequot people do not see the Treaty of Harford of 1638 as a treaty at all. Because my Pequot history isn't taught, most students in Connecticut do not understand how and why students, like myself, continue to be hurt by exclusion, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding.

The intergenerational trauma inherent within all Native Americans is a very real phenomenon, and a difficult burden for Native American students to carry, yet we don't have a choice, nor do we receive education in this subject through our public schools.

Perhaps all Connecticut students should watch the film at our museum over in Mashantucket called The Witness in order to help them better understand.

Excluding Pequot history from our public schools showed me as a Native youth that we don't matter to most people. Usually, we just try to fit in, to me it felt like I was taking off a mask every time I came home from school.

Respectfully speaking, I don't understand why addressing this issue has taken so long, and we would urge the Committee to make the language stronger by instituting mandatory inclusion of our comprehensive Native American studies curriculum that also mandates course offerings for high school students.

I agree to speak today because I want to help create more pride in our tribal community among my younger relatives. What we all need our schools that will

work to create familiarity and bridges of understanding between Native and nonnative students alike. If this Bill becomes law, the Connecticut public school system and students learning about Connecticut's tribal communities culture, history and contributions can help to build those bridges faster and more effectively.

In closing, I want to share words from a great Native leader, sharing wisdom about identity and leadership. Her name was Wilma Mankiller and she said these two things, "America would be a better place if leaders would do more long term thinking." And "an Indian is an Indian regardless of the degree of Indian blood or which little government card they do or do not possess." [Foreign language], thank you all.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Phyllip, for your testimony today. I do have a couple of people with their hands up. Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): First of all, thank you for -- Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for standing for especially the youth in the tribe. It was very important for you to stand and let people know that -- the importance of what we're trying to accomplish and what we have been fighting for, for too long. And you are correct, there should -- there's no reason why this shouldn't have been done prior just like the last Bill that was passed for Blacks and Puerto Ricans.

And I just -- I'm glad to see you come forward and stand for the Youth Council, and I want you to stay encouraged because this is a fight that we're going to continue to make sure that this comes to fruition. So once again, thank you very much.

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you Representative.
Representative Welander.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Good morning, thank you both for being here today. I was wondering if you could share with us how your experience in your education growing up could have been different if the curriculum reflected your history more accurately?

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Yeah, so like growing up in Ledyard, it seems like the town has always have -- has always had like a sort of resentment towards our kids.

Whether that be like putting us all in level three courses when not all of us are level three learning kids, or like putting us into just different classes that didn't really seem to like equate to our levels to where we were like knowledge wise or learning wise or anything like that.

Seems like we've butted heads a lot ever since I was a kid. And I just remember like all of my -- everything that I've ever learned about who I am has been outside of school when I have had -- and I didn't really realize this until I got to college. I've had students from -- like just colleagues, teammates, anything from different states that have spoken to me about what they've learned.

And it's just ironic to me that Ledyard, I don't even know when Ledyard was created, like late 1800s. They've been around Mashantucket since Ledyard has been a thing and they've never really -- never really shined a light on like who we are, how we're -- how we ended up there, how things got to where they were. And I think like helping mend that relationship would definitely -- would definitely help us get in the right direction.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): So it's safe to say that this type -- including this type of intersectional curriculum could have had a huge change on the trajectory for many students and how they viewed themselves, and also would have impacted how the

community around you behaved and went forward with their actions.

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Yeah, and another thing about that too. Growing up over here, we have a -- one of our biggest issues is identity. We have a lot of identity issues within our youth, whether that be because we have sides of our family that look white, we have sides of our family that look Black, we have sides of our family that look light skin, mixed. And we don't really have something where someone can look at us and be like oh, they're Pequot. Unless you grew up in Ledyard and you've been around us for like a while, you wouldn't really know who we are, unless you speak to us.

So sometimes like we'll be in scenarios where we'll hear something or see something that is somebody like -- I guess just like not really not really in favor of us and not talking the best about us but they won't really know that because like of how we look, and that just diminishes the identity to begin with when you have a teacher up there talking lies and things about you in front of your class that you don't really know. And then on top of that, they're also not speaking about it in any other manner, so like not in any sort of positive way, not in any sort of -- it just seemed like it was either a little bit of negativenes [sic] or nothing at all.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): I'm sorry that happened to you, but thank you for sharing your perspectives, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you Representative.
Senator Berthel

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll be quick. Mr. Thomas, thank you for again coming before the Committee, I remember meeting you last year and I think I stood right behind you when you and the other members of the tribe where -- did

perform the drum ceremony outside of the LOD after your testimony.

So I thank you for being here. I really appreciate the perspective that you're providing via your leadership role as the youth coordinator or youth leader for the tribe because, you know, regardless of your ancestral history, I think it's wonderful and just so powerful to have a young person who is looking to bring that forward. They -- you know, I'm of Italian ancestry right, so we have traditions in my household, we have a little bit of German as well, but we have we have traditions that we continue obviously just within our household. And, you know, what you're doing is taking that to a very different level and a very important level, considering how just incredibly important the recognition and making sure that we don't forget history, and that we that we honor that.

And I'm glad that you as a young person has taken that charge on within your tribal nation to do that. And again, I thank you for being here. Mr. Chair, I didn't really have a question, I just wanted to make a statement. So I look forward to continuing to work with you and the other tribal nations in Connecticut to get this issue resolved, I'll say, and again, thank you, Mr. Thomas for being here, thank you, Mr. Chair.

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): You're welcome.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Senator and thank you Phyllip for your testimony again. I don't see any other hands up, so thank you so much for being here today.

PHYLLIP THOMAS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, I'm going to go back to the student Lillian Bertram. I see you're on.

LILLIAN BERTRAM: Yes, hello.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you go. Hi, Lillian.

LILLIAN BERTRAM: Hello, my name is Lillian Bertram. I attended the East Hartford public school district, I'm currently a student at the University of Hartford majoring in entrepreneurial studies. This semester, I have been given the opportunity to be a preceptor where I work closely with the professor to teach a communications course.

Within the first week of the course, I had given a presentation where I described how my hair as a Black woman characterizes me. After class, the only Black student in the course walked up to me and described how much she related to and enjoyed my presentation. As I helped teach this course, I developed an interest in educating and making an impact on minority communities.

Unfortunately, my goal to be an educator is impacted by my skin color. In my academic career I've had the luxury of having three educators, three Black educators. I say luxury because it isn't often that students are able to have Black and minority students educators throughout their academic careers. In my case, those three educators have impacted my life on an academic level, as well as a mental and emotional level. I will always remember the moment when my Black teacher consoled me after another student called me the N word. Outside the classroom the teacher explained to me that I needed to continue to work hard because opportunities aren't handed to people like us but opportunities are things we have to fight for.

During and after our classes, we have extensive talks about the social injustices black people have to face. Many of these conversations brought minority students closer to this teacher and as a

result, these students became more engaged in learning.

I am not saying a white teacher cannot help me or anyone through situations regarding racism. And I am not saying that a white teacher isn't capable of providing insight on social injustice, however, as a student we find comfort and inspiration knowing that the people who teach us have experienced our struggle and are a living example of breaking free from that struggle. Once students notice that the people who teach them are humans like themselves, we can foster a better learning environment.

In high school Black staff members would always refer to me as the political activists Angela Davis. Now I come to the realization that these staff members saw me as a key figure in improving our community. Black teachers and staff proved to me that I can do more than make a change, I can be the change. Today I'm deciding to be the change for students across the country, I'm going to pursue a career, not only in business, but also in education. Moreover, there is no place in education for prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

In education we teach a better tomorrow, and in my tomorrow, I see none of those things. Senate Bill 1034 is necessary in helping me reach my goal. With this Bill future minority educators, such as myself, will be able to teach heart, teach power and teach students that they are more than the color of their skin, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Lillian. And I am so happy that you're going to go into the educational field, you don't know how happy that makes me, and your hair is beautiful. Let me tell you something, some people may not know this and I was looking through my gallery of pictures because I wanted to show you that I used to have a curly afro when I was in high school.

Believe it or not, I don't have any hair now basically, but I was so proud to walk around with my curly half afro and my bell bottoms in high school [laughter]. And, you know, people would make fun of me, and I -- and they would say, you know, what is your problem, Bobby, but I was happy to have my curly afro. So -- and I'm glad that we probably passed the CROWN act on and we look forward to doing more when it comes to minority teacher recruitment.

And I am so happy that you are going to proceed with the -- as an educator. That is so great, that's the best news I've heard today. Thank you so much.

LILLIAN BERTRAM: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And I think my Co-Chair, Doug -- Doug, I don't think you heard her whole testimony but she did an outstanding job with her testimony. Do you have any questions for her?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Is that the young lady from University of Hartford.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Lillian Bertram.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Lillian, my people will be reaching out to you, I know they already did, we will be in contact, everything else from there will be offline all right, you hear me.

LILLIAN BERTRAM: Okay, thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): They already reached out to you, I know they have. I'll be talking to you offline. Thank you very much, I know your testimony was outside and I think again, did I hear you're going to go in into the field of education?

LILLIAN BERTRAM: [laughter] Yes, I will.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, we going to hook up. All right, great. All set, thank you. Thank you again.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any other hands up. Nope, okay. Thank you so much, Lillian.

LILLIAN BERTRAM: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next I'm going to go to Beth Regan. And I see you there, Beth, how are you?

BETH REGAN: [Foreign language] Chairman McCrory, Sanchez, Ranking Members and all the Members, but I'm going to go off script for a minute and say how wonderful it was to hear from those students, okay, today, and how I've -- Lillian please go into education, love that.

I think today that I can bring a very unique perspective and experience for you all. Before I came to serve my Mohegan tribe on our Council of Elders in 2014, I was a 35 plus year career educator at Tolland high school where I taught American history, world history and then decided, please, can we hear other voices and I taught Native American studies for the last 20 plus years of my career.

It was a course that I developed, I wrote the curriculum for with the help of my school, my administrators and Nancy Wyman was from Tolland, I was able -- so I had the support of my administrators, my teachers, but mostly my tribe. You know, imagine teaching Native American -- imagine teaching American history as a Native person and teaching units that -- on manifest destiny, okay. People already noticed the -- mentioned the other topics. And so I think I can bring that unique experience, and so I'm very proud to say that Tolland high school does actually have a curriculum and, of course, in Native American studies since 2001. But I also thought that I would like to share with you what happens because you hear what happens

when we're left out, the invisibility of people, that's what it feels like often. You heard Keith -- I think Mr. Thomas, Phyllip Thomas talk about being invisible. That's a real thing, that's a real thing, and identity.

But I thought I'd share when you really do teach, when you actually do include to have a course totally dedicated to Native people, their history and culture, and today, because see, we're not just in the past. We keep talking about history but we're still here. We have vibrant cultures, we -- I spoke to you in some of our language that is being reborn here, restored here, okay. So I think it's important here, listen to the testimonials of some students that took this class as seniors that wrote -- I went and dug out my file to tell you. "Thank you, Ms. Regan, I would like to thank you for bringing so many beautiful people and experiences into my life, guest speakers, all of them.

I will carry this throughout my life, you gave me a cultural awareness that we would never have truly grasped otherwise. Continue to bring these experiences to your students, I will find a way to pay it forward." "Thank you, your class taught me a completely different perspective, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to have learned so much. I was completely ignorant of many of the issues facing Indians, both in the past and present, but thank you for this class, that will no longer be the case," these are now clearly adults that are doing it, "opened my eyes to other cultures and made me appreciate that. Thank you for presenting the side of the story that nobody else has ever taught me my entire life. It's been an eye opening experience, creating this class you have taking huge strides towards informing the public of what history neglects to tell us. This class has changed my views and on life itself," and they go on, you can imagine they go on like that.

So when -- to understand what happens when we do, do these things is as important to understand is what is missing when we don't. You know, I believe this act, I really support HB 6619 now in completely in a model curriculum, it can be done. As a matter of fact, ironically, this resource book was created in 2000 by the Connecticut State Department of Education with the illustration from Mohegan, was in conjunction with many of the tribal nations that you heard speak today. And as much as it's just a resource book, as much as it was in 2001, this was part of what I did as well and used as well.

Our Mohegan tribe, we are very proud to be part of this and to support this. We have our Tantaquidgeon museum that was founded by Jon Tantaquidgeon and his children to teach not only our people, but others about our survival, you know, the Tantaquidgeon had a saying that that I think illustrates this, "You can't hate someone you know a lot about." That was from the museum, that really, really illustrates how we feel about that.

Our tribe also, Mohegan tribe continues to -- their commitment to education, our state. Did you know we have a challenge grant program here where schools, okay, and we -- where schools can apply for this grant and receive resources towards getting educational resources. We provide professional development, we provide curriculum materials, we also support the teacher of the year program. We are a major sponsor of the teacher of the year program where we bring in educators and celebrate them, not only the finalists but local district teachers, we offer professional development.

And please let me note that to -- every person, every teacher that we bring in is so receptive, and one of the things that they always say is we don't have the resources, we need the curriculum, we need the resources and they gobble up whatever we can provide. This can be done in such meaningful ways.

I've heard -- I was listening to much of the testimony about reading and writing, you can -- not only can we have a model curriculum. You can incorporate Native studies into so many things, the oral tradition, our stories I used with my students to help prepare them as a matter of fact, for state tests when they had to take a position and -- or read for information. Use Native histories, use Native stories, it can be done in those ways as well, but I still support the model curriculum. I really do and I helped like I said, our tribe and myself helped write a curriculum for a high school class. Hopefully, those high school students will get it sooner, with the K8 as well.

So in addition to this, we do a lot of these things and we'd love to be a part of this. While the efforts that our tribe has done, they're clearly important and instrumental and to sharing our story, but they fell way, way short of educating the whole of Connecticut. It's vital that we teach our history, we are still here and our culture and our governments today, everything today, not just the history. It's more vital that we bring this understanding of our survival, of our survival to -- as a government, as a culture, as a people to all of you. The proposal you have today, I fully -- and the tribe fully supports. I'm grateful to Senator Osten and all the others that have spoken in support of this, and I'd be happy to answer any questions in any way that you have that I might be able to assist in. Thank you. [Foreign language]. Thank you to all of our relations.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much, Beth. We do have a raised -- a hand raised. Representative Nolan. You're muted. Representative Nolan, you're muted.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Sorry about that. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Beth, for coming before us today. You said something that really says it all. You said the side of the story that no one else has

taught us that one of your students, I believe, told you. That explains exactly why this curriculum is needed, because we hear the stories, but the stories are not the stories that are, one, meaningful, two, truthful always, and three, that helps our children become unhidden in the classroom and in the schools that they're in.

And so I just want to thank you because that right there was powerful and I might -- just going to use that as a -- I'm going to use that as a post later on, on social network because I think that explains perfectly why it is so important for the Native American curriculum to be added, just like other curriculums have recently been added. So thank you very much for coming before us today.

BETH REGAN: [Foreign language] I couldn't agree with you more, Representative Nolan. And we have resources right here in Connecticut as was -- I think Senator Osten said to go to these places as well. Taking students out of our classrooms to visit is very, very important as well. That's why our challenge grant was so well received because we would support and sponsor students coming here, and it makes all the difference in the world.

And you know what? The elementary school teachers used to say -- because I do a lot of outreaches still. Our tribe does numerous outreaches free of charge to schools in Connecticut. And one of the things that teachers always say is I'm so glad you're going to be here because my students think that Indians or Native Americans, we -- that's another discussion, okay, are in the past, that they're just extinct. And they use that word extinct like I'm -- oh my goodness.

So, I do think it's important, so thank you and to stop the invisibility. I appreciate your comments.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Yes. I -- Please send me your information via email --

BETH REGAN: I'd be happy to.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): -- for further discussion.
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative Nolan. And, Beth, we have one more question. Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just very quickly, Beth, thank you for being here and sharing your story and the comments of your students, you have so much passion, it's wonderful. But I just -- I'm curious, so I love hearing you speak, and I'm curious about the language because we know what a vital, important role language plays in any culture and history. So how do you keep -- how have you learned the language and are there tools there for a continuation of language study as well? Thank you.

BETH REGAN: Thank you for your question. Well, here at Mohegan, we are in the middle of a language restoration project that has been years in the making. And at this time we are training, because one of our sister languages, Algonquin languages, we were able to get support from Wampanoag and another sister language, and we are now training in -- three teacher apprentices, Mohegan teacher apprentices, and offering our people language classes. And so I took part of that as well, even as a 64 year old it's not easy to learn language trust me, okay. But it's -- it really is identity, it really is our identity, so I'm learning our language even more.

This has been ongoing for years and years, but we really got to a place in the past three years that it's starting to thrive. So I appreciate your comments on our language. It's a language restoration program.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): It sounds wonderful, and good luck with it. And thank you, thanks.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. One more question. Representative Kennedy.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I didn't say hello to my friend there. Beth, it's great to see you, thanks for coming by and I always love hearing you speak in the Native tongue, so thank you, I hope you're well, and thank you for your input today, it really means a lot. Be well.

BETH REGAN: [Foreign language] thank you [Foreign language] be well to all of you, and like I said, having lived teaching Native American studies, having been part of our tribal government, our tribe is very supportive and whatever we can do to help, as was said by the other tribal nations, everyone's story is critical, and I really support -- we really support wholeheartedly this Bill. [Foreign language], everyone. Thank you.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you, Beth. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you so much for your testimony today, thank you.

BETH REGAN: [Foreign language]

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have one of our Committee Members. We usually don't take testimony from our Committee Members, what we do is we have them submit written testimony but we're going to let Representative Smith up next to testify an important Bill that's important to him.

REP. SMITH (118TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your indulgence. I am a Member of this Committee and I don't want to try the Committee's patients by violating the protocols.

Just simply to say I will -- as a Member of the Committee, I will respond in greater detail to subsequent speakers. But I'm here to support adoption of new language to the model curriculum 6619 Bill. My Bill is -- original proposal was for a civics education task force to be formed for the state of Connecticut.

It was timely, I think, because of some national efforts in that regard to provide some guidelines. It is not intended to be a national curriculum, it is not intended to impose graduation requirements or standards or any other type of curriculum requirements. It is simply to devise policies and standards, including curriculum on civics education.

I was inspired to this on January six as we drove home from the capitol after our swearing in to hear the historic siege of the US Capitol building, and when I got home I decided this is showing us a breakdown of basic civics engagement, basic understanding of our federal system, and this is importantly, not going to be ideological, it is going to be nonpartisan. But I think it's something that requires the kind of force of purpose that we've shown to science and technologies for many years now in our public schools.

I am also -- this is consistent with testimony submitted by your Secretary of the State Merrill, who have filed testimony in support of this concept to be added to the Bill. And I will yield my time now to -- I will get off now, but will be responding and expanding to subsequent speakers, but I want to thank you and Chairman McCrory, Chairman McCarty, other Ranking Members for indulging me these few minutes. Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Representative, and that most definitely we can talk later about the civics portion that you would like to expand in the model curriculum. So we will have those discussions, thank you for sharing that. I

believe that our Treasurer, Connecticut Treasurer, Mr. Wooden is on.

SHAWN WOODEN: I am.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You are, there you are. Hi, how are you, Mr. Treasurer?

SHAWN WOODEN: Very well.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We will let you -- we will let you go and testify now.

SHAWN WOODEN: Thank you, Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty and Members of the Education Committee for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 1033, AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AS PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS. I want to thank the Committee for raising this Bill and tackling this important issue. I was proud to work with this committee last year on a similar Bill that I asked to have raised.

As I've outlined in my written testimony. the lack of financial literacy in our state and across the country has damaging effects that can last a lifetime and impact generations of families. We all recognize the challenges that young people face as they struggle to pay bills and manage their money. When they lack a strong foundational understanding of personal finances, they're often vulnerable to expensive credit behaviors like payday loans, high interest credit cards and exorbitant student debt.

I remember my own first few days of college and an experience that you or maybe your children may have seen for yourself, while walking into my students center there were companies lining the walkway to sign teenagers up to open credit cards tied to bad financial terms, and in exchange for high interest

rates and annual fees a student would receive a trendy T-shirt or maybe even a poster.

Ill-informed financial decisions made at this age can have consequences that can follow you into adulthood. They can contribute to defaulting on loans and bad credit scores, and make it hard for young people and families to move up the economic ladder.

The lack of access to financial literacy resources also contributes to something I've been talking a lot about over the past year, the racial wealth gap. We know that the ratio wealth gap is astronomical, with the average White families net worth eight times the wealth of the average Black family and five times the wealth of the average Hispanic family. While this gap can be traced to centuries of systemic discrimination and lack of access to capital, ensuring every student takes a class in personal financial management before they graduate is one small step we can take in our effort to break down the barriers to building generational wealth.

When I kicked off an economic empowerment listening tour upon entering office, my first stop was a professional development workshop on financial literacy at HC Wilcox Technical High School in Meriden. I heard directly from dozens of teachers who teach financial literacy they spoke to the positive impact that their classes have on students and their families. However, I couldn't help but notice that the majority of the schools that already have a graduation requirement for financial literacy were the more affluent school districts in our state.

For me, the teaching of financial literacy in our schools is a matter of basic preparedness for all students and a matter of racial equity. Are we preparing all students with the basic skills they need to manage in life? Are we graduating students who can apply what they've learned in school to the

challenges that they will certainly face in life, no matter which zip code they live in.

When it comes to financial literacy, all of the research suggests that the answer to that question right now is a resounding no. Connecticut recently received a failing grade for financial literacy, according to a nationwide survey. Other states recognize the reality that more than one in six students in the country fail to reach the baseline level of proficiency in financial literacy. To help fight this trend, 21 States now require financial classes for high school graduates.

The time has come to join the 21 other states that require classes in personal financial management and pass this Bill. I thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I urge you to act favorably on Senate Bill 1033. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you so much, Shawn. You're absolutely right, financial literacy is very, very important. And I didn't know it was 21 states already. Wow. Hopefully, we can be number 22 soon.

I don't see any other hands raised. Oh, yes, I do. Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Mr. Treasurer, for the comments. I just want to -- I don't have a question. I want to give a shoutout. You know, we have Junior Achievement and some other organizations that run around our state and in a prior career, working in Downtown Hartford, I did have the opportunity to visit a couple of Hartford public schools on behalf of you know Junior Achievement, and you know and did financial training-type classes with second-graders, with fourth-graders and you know, and with high school and it's -- I mean, it's true we don't take the time to help our, you know, our young people know simple things like how to

balance a checkbook. And you know, how can you know budget and invest if you can't do that, so -- Everybody's very enthusiastic about doing that.

And, you know, I would urge you to take a look at Junior Achievement and their curriculum, because I have a feeling it probably aligns pretty nicely with what we're looking to accomplish. Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative Bolinsky. And I think Senator McCrory wanted to say something.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Mr. Treasurer, you can go ahead first.

SHAWN WOODEN: I was -- I just wanted to follow up with Representative Bolinsky's comments and say there are actually -- we have at our fingertips, the resources from a lot of different sources to bring the bear for financial literacy and curriculum, even materials. What we don't have is a systemic approach in our state that requires that no child leaves our school system with those fundamental --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): [Crosstalk]

SHAWN WOODEN: And so Junior Achievement has been great, they've been around for a long time, and I think we need to take this next step to make it systemic because it is so fundamental and important. There are lots of things about and I'm well aware of the debates and the concerns about mandates and curriculum and there are lots of things that we can debate about whether or not they should be mandated in a curriculum.

I feel like this is a subject that universally like every child -- like shame on us as policy leaders, if we can't make sure they have those basic skills that 100% of every student indisputably, will require to manage in life successfully.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): [crosstalk]

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): I would definitely agree completely with you on that, Shawn. I think we need to make it incumbent on everybody. You know, when you hear the stories about the credit card offers and all the people that are out there that are looking to prey on our young folks. You know, having them understand the basic financial principles of, you know, running a household or saving for something that they really, really want to work for. And how to run a budget is -- is fundamental. So, you know, I think a statewide standard would probably -- Not probably, would definitely benefit a lot. So thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any more hands? Anyone else for Treasurer Wooden?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Leeper has her hand up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'll let her go first and with my comment, I'll just some summarize.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you Secretary -- Treasurer Wooden, sorry, for your compelling testimony. I had actually pushed for adding personal finances a requirement as a Board of Ed Member here in Fairfield when the State redid the graduation requirements a couple of years ago. And I would just want your thoughts on, as currently written, it requires one credit which would be a full-year course and I'm wondering if you think it would be sufficient for the requirement to be a half a credit or a one-semester course?

SHAWN WOODEN: Yeah. I think we can, based on where we are today, I think we can achieve a lot within a semester on this topic. And so I do think there's flexibility there, there should be flexibility there.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Yeah. I couldn't agree more with what you said about this just being fundamental to the lifelong success of our kids and just core real-world knowledge that we are not necessarily adequately preparing them for right now.

And I know that rubs up against the proposed requirement to have this be ready and in place for the graduating class of 2023. I worry that is a little unmanageable for districts. Would you be open to moving that back so that high schools had the opportunity to get this curriculum in place, teachers prepared and get the funding they may need to hire a new teacher to teach this type of curriculum?

SHAWN WOODEN: The -- So I can't speak to, you know, kind of local funding components. What I can say is from a curriculum development perspective, that the time is more than adequate, right. Representative Bolinsky made reference to Junior Achievement. There are just lots of like resources at the ready in terms of curriculum that can be incorporated. Now, from a FTE planning at the local level, you know, I would defer to the local officials' views on that.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Right. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. BOLINSKY (106TH): This is Representative Bolinsky. I hate to -- I hate to butt in, but I will. You know, wouldn't it be cool if we could do something where we enjoin local businesses to do this? There's nothing more exciting in school than when, you know, have Parents Day.

Or, you know, people come in from the Community and talk about their careers and stuff like that. Well, instead of that, why don't we -- why don't we have, you know, local bankers, local people, with financial experience, like even marketing people,

come on in, and, you know, have this thing be a special-type curricula that -- You know, we'd have to obviously work out how we would handle it logistically so that we make sure that we have reliable coverage.

But instead of starting up a whole new department, why don't we take advantage of the concept of handling it as a village? Just a thought.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Representative Bolinsky. I just want to add, Treasurer Wooden, you're absolutely right. The reality is, however, in the State of Connecticut, there are school districts that are actually doing this and they are doing it very well and they're doing it as a one-credit course. And that separates our high-resource school districts for my lower-resource school districts. So therefore some schools are having the advantage to go out there and recognize the value of financial literacy and others are not. So I agree. I think we need to get this done.

The good thing I found out earlier today when SDE came, is that this course can be used to fulfill -- A course and I think it is STEAM -- not STEAM but uh, yeah just looking for my train of thought. It is always available and it can fill one of the requirements on and then -- a math requirements. So we can do this. And I will love -- this is something I tried to push last year and the year before. I believe, is something we have to do.

I'm not sure we can get all done this particular year, but as a part of our model curriculum, that's a great start. That's a foot in that door and it's something that we could and should and have to push forward very soon. And that's something I plan on doing. So I thank you for your testimony, thank you for your support and your advocacy for something like this. I appreciate, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Representative McCarty wanted to ask a question.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah. Thank you very much and I'm sorry and I'll go very quickly. I just wanted to thank Treasurer Wooden for being here today, I know you've been a strong advocate of the Personal Finance in our schools.

But going along with what Senator McCrory just said, if it's allowed and we get out a campaign to encourage our districts to offer financial literacy, I would prefer to see it less as counting toward one of the STEM requirements and the reason for that is because we've tried so hard to create some flexibility within our high school requirements so students can follow their particular career pathways.

So while I'm very supportive of financial management, I would not want to see an additional requirement at this time because we're really struggling right now to meet those 25 requirements that we have put on to our students. But I do believe that an advocacy program to encourage districts, to offer the course and then to allow it to be used with the STEM requirement, I think that may solve some of the issues. And then let's look as we continue to move forward and I'm wondering if you would be acceptable to an approach of that sort?

SHAWN WOODEN: So I continue to believe that we should not allow high school students to go out into the world without those skills. And so, in that sense, I think a requirement is if you share that belief, I think a requirement is a natural outgrowth of that perspective and that belief. And with that said, right, the practicalities are you have to juggle a lot of priorities with the curriculum. And I am mindful of that.

You know I spent time last year, I don't know what whether to call him, yes, Secretary Cardona, talking

about this and the tension with the mandates and what we're doing with curriculums. So I'm very cognizant of that fact. But I do believe it is a disservice to our students to allow them to graduate without that knowledge.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well, and I appreciate that very much, Treasure Wooden, and I think we need to get the word out to our districts, that this is something of vital importance to a holistic education and that it will serve our students well going forward, but I think it's going to take some more advocacy. But thank you very much for being here today.

SHAWN WOODEN: And the credit card companies will give credit cards to those who take it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): As long as they don't have a balance on the credit card.

SHAWN WOODEN: Right?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I got you. Thank you very much for your testimony.

SHAWN WOODEN: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Alright. Up next, we have someone from the public, I believe, it is Dawn Crayco. Dawn.

DAWN CRAYCO: Yes. Hello. Can you hear me?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, very well.

DAWN CRAYCO: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, and all Members of the Education Committee. My name is Dawn Crayco and I'm the Program Director for FoodCorps Connecticut and a representative of the Connecticut Farm-to-School collaborative. Thanks for the opportunity to speak and soak in some really

powerful testimony this afternoon from those who've presented before me.

I'm here to speak in support of HB 6621, AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES, and specifically, Section 3, which establishes a Connecticut Grown through Connecticut Kids grants program. I've submitted written testimony, plenty of it so I'll just some I spend my time highlighting a few points.

FoodCorps is a national non-profit organization with a mission to connect kids to healthy food in school. Through our AmeriCorps field program, we've worked with dozens of schools and over 20 high needs school districts in Connecticut and these partnerships have really shown us that empowering students to grow and cook food opens up a world of possibilities for student learning. You can learn about food through STEM, English language arts, cultures, history, can all do it through food.

Experiential learning opportunities outside in a school garden can be empowering ways for students to connect to each other, the environment and where their food comes from. And then seeing it in the cafeteria, representative of those foods grown in the garden or by a farm and their local community, really helps it comes full circle for students. The research follows a study that FoodCorps conducted with Tisch Center at Columbia University showed that FoodCorps schools with more hands-on food education, the students in those schools are actually eating three times the number of fruits and vegetables served in the cafeteria.

So, bringing it back to this Bill specifically, the creation of a Connecticut Grown through Connecticut Kids program with support efforts, like those I mentioned for even more communities throughout our state. The Bill is a little confusing as it's written now but it's really intended to build off of an existing State Statute 2238(D), which established

a Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids initiative in 2016. And, as a partnership -- [crosstalk] Yes.

LUZ OSUBA: Please summarize your testimony.

DAWN CRAYCO: Great. Thank you. So it's building off of an existing statue that currently isn't funded. So this would provide dedicated funding to support the -- support the efforts I explained and our hope and request is for \$500,000 annually to fund schools, districts, community organizations and early childcare sites, ensuring equity by prioritizing alliance districts and school readiness programs.

And I'll just conclude by saying that this is really timely. Food insecurity has grown immensely due to the pandemic. District leaders and school leaders are really looking for ways to engage students and get them back to school. Being outside can help with healing from the trauma and stress related to the pandemic. And other states have really led the way in this. So Vermont, New York, Maine, Massachusetts. All have similar programs that have been successful.

With that, I'll wrap up and just thank you for the opportunity to speak and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Is that -- Representative Gibson.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and thank you for opportunity to ask my question. Good afternoon, Dawn, how are you?

DAWN CRAYCO: Hi, Representative Gibson, good. How are you?

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Good. Thank you for your testimony.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Gibson, your camera's not on.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): I'm having problems with my device. Is that okay if I continue or -- ?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, go ahead. That's fine.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Alright, thank you. Thank you, Senator. I thought I'll make it quick. I'm sorry my camera's not on, I do apologize. Are there any other school districts in the State of Connecticut who are doing something simpler or simple or something the same lines of what you're talking about today?

DAWN CRAYCO: Yeah, there -- so the Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids is essentially Connecticut's State Farm-to-School program and Farm-to-school really encompasses efforts in the classroom, the school garden, and the cafeteria, really bringing the Community together around food through food education and local sourcing of those items in the cafeteria. And there are lots of examples of this happening throughout the State. Some are leading with curriculum efforts, some are procuring and have really wonderful partnerships with local farms and others have established gardens.

What I think this program would really do is help communities identify how to take their programs if they have no program, no Farm-to-School efforts going, start in on one of those things that I mentioned for those that have started programs to really take them to the next level. Because, as I mentioned, there really isn't a state funding vehicle for Farm-to-School programs or Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids program. So I could

point to some examples from Members on the Committee, like East Hartford, that's doing wonderful work. Hartford, that's working really closely with Keney Park Sustainability Projects for locally-sourced foods and throughout the State, as well.

So there are models there and they're also looking for financial support to help make these efforts, sustainable so that kids really benefit and our communities benefit.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Great. Has there been any three occasions with the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, as far as the State support from his office?

DAWN CRAYCO: Yeah, so the Commissioner of Agriculture is supportive of Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids but the Statute actually rests under his Department, so to work closely with the Department of Education and Agriculture have supported Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids week, which is. A week and early October to really highlight the work that's happening across the State. And we've been working closely with the Commissioner on the idea of this program and have received support and how to make it work really well for Connecticut and for the Department, as well.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Thank you, Dawn. I can say, as a long-time science teacher, this is a really good Bill and would benefit our farmers and especially, our students as far as nutrition. And especially in times of COVID and so many food insecurities. Another way of taking care of yourself and being healthy and growing your own food, so thank you for your testimony and thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to ask those questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. I just wanted to say something real quick before I move on to Representative Currey, who's raised his hand. I know you've been working also with Joey Listro in New Britain, New Britain ROOTS and I know that he runs a really good program here in New Britain, so I'm looking forward to seeing this legislation move out of the Committee, and hopefully we can get the funds to help make this happen.

Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and first off, Happy St. Patrick's Day, everyone. We have a new shirt this year. So I just wanted to thank you for your testimony today and for mentioning East Hartford. I think the importance around the work that you're doing, and that we hope to continue doing throughout Connecticut.

Especially just giving students who otherwise wouldn't know where their food came from. I mean, we planted some of these beds at some of these schools in East Hartford and many students didn't realize that a carrot grew underground.

I mean, so it's things like that that's really truly exposing children to something they otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to. So we really appreciate everything that you and your coalition are doing around this and I look forward to continuing to support this, until this makes its way through. So thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. And thank you, Dawn, for your testimony.

DAWN CRAYCO: Representative Sanchez, Joey Listro will be testifying later so you'll get to hear from him, too.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, I see him on the list so I'm looking forward to that, thank you.

DAWN CRAYCO: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Gregory Cava.
Mr. Cava.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, where are you? I don't
see you.

GREGORY CAVA: Yes. Well, I'm here on the top of
the screen, so I don't know.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are. I see you now,
okay.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yeah, you're up. It's your
floor.

GREGORY CAVA: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'd like
to thank the Co-Chairs and the Committee for the
opportunity to address you today. My name is
Gregory J. Cava, I'm the Chairman of the Board of
Education for Regional School District No. 12. Our
region is located in Southern Litchfield County and
is composed of the towns of Bridgewater, Roxbury,
and Washington. And I send greetings to our State
Senator, Mr. Berthel. Because we have the newest Ag
Science program in Connecticut, we also educate and
provide opportunities to Agrosience students from
the City of Danbury and the towns of Bethel
Brookfield, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, and
Sherman. And in addition, our Shepaug Valley School
is one of the high school students from Sherman,
which had no high school may attend. And I'm here
today to provide testimony on raised House Bill
6618.

I am also pleased to say that, with the exception of
one short interval in one school, our schools have
been open for full in-person education since August
2020. One big assist was the fact that we've
devoted significant attention to maintaining and

updating our HVAC systems, as Deputy-Secretary Kosta Diamantis rightly reminded us, is essential.

Two years ago, the legislature made a change that was met with enthusiasm by school officials and districts across Connecticut, changing the threshold for school districts to increase their contribution to their non-lapsing account from 1% of their annual budget to 2%. Unfortunately, the legislation amended only the statutory provision governing municipal school systems, and I believe inadvertently failed to include a change to the separate provision in the Statute governing regional school systems. Raised House Bill 6618 corrects this oversight and I'm here to urge its swift passage into law. Contributions to its non-lapsing account is the only money a school district is permitted to hold over a year-to-year if unspent.

In Region 12, our newest school building is our middle high school originally constructed 51 years ago, that has just benefited from a significant building project to add Agrosience facilities and improve our science labs. We have other school buildings one with a section that is an original one-room schoolhouse built in 1856. Accordingly, our capital needs are significant and often arise acutely. This non-lapsing account has allowed us to save for unexpected capital expenses and budget for anticipated capital expenses.

Moreover, a healthy non-lapsing account is of particular assistance in achieving a better bond rating and this results in lower borrowing costs and lower taxes for the three municipalities that comprise our region. It's not often that you get the chance to, with one short seven-line Bill, to improve and assist education, lower municipal borrowing costs and hence taxes and do it with no cost to the State.

So I thank you for your time and consideration of our request and I'd be happy to answer any questions that any of you may have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Gregory. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Curry.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Rep. Curry, followed by Senator Berthel.

REP. JEFF CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Cava, for coming out today and highlighting what was likely an oversight on the Legislator's party in not including our regional districts in this particular provision. And for those who may have not been here in past years, this is something that we had done progressively 1% to 2%. And I think our I'm hopeful that we'll be able to fix this slight blunder of ours and provide you with the necessary tools to be able to move forward with capital improvements in the future. So thank you for that.

GREGORY CAVA: Thank you very much, Representative.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Senator Berthel.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Cava, good to see you, Sir. Thank you for your work on the Board of Education in Region 12. This is, as my esteemed colleague, Representative Currey just mentioned, this is actually not the first time we've had this this legislation before us. If I'm not mistaken, last session we got to exactly this point in time, almost literally a year ago when everything got shut down and we had -- We had brought forth this Bill and actually passed it out of Committee. So this makes sense.

I appreciate you coming forth on behalf of, not only the Region 12, but certainly three of my towns that

I represent in the 32nd senate. We're fortunate to have three regional school systems here, so this will help in not only your school system in Region 12 but also 14 and 15. So again, I appreciate your advocacy in support of this Bill today and I think the Committee can take swift and appropriate action to remedy this on behalf of our regional school districts. Thank you for being here and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GREGORY CAVA: Thank you, Senator, I appreciate your support.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Yeah, you're welcome. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any other hands.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, again, thank you, Greg, for your testimony. We have up next, Leonard Lockhart, from the great Town of Windsor, Board of Education.

LEONARD LOCKHART: Good afternoon to the Co-Chairman, the Ranking Members and Members of the Committee and a special good afternoon to my State Senator, Senator McCrory, and my Representative Brandon McGee.

I am here on behalf of CAFE, as area director of -- co-area director of area directing. The Connecticut Board of Association -- Board of Education support revisions and Section 1 of Senate Bill 1033, which clarifies that computer science is included and exist in nine credit course high school graduation requirement for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, often known as STEM.

However, CAFE is opposed to the addition of financial literacy as a specific graduation

requirement. While recognizing the importance of financial literacy, CABE urge you to refrain from any additional -- from this addition of this specific item to the existing high school graduation requirement.

When the new high school graduation requirements were established, there was extensive discussion of the coursework that would be prescribed in statute balanced with the need to allow students' interests to be reflected in their course selections.

CABE strongly also supports House Bill 6618, which addresses several important funding issues. Specifically, CABE supports Section 1, which allows the Commissioner to grant some flexibility to the Alliance Districts in the expenditure of a portion of their funding. Section 2, which allows Boards of Education to carry over any unexpected federal funds receive to address the costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Since some of the eligible costs are ongoing, this allows Boards of Education to utilize these funds in a responsible and effective manner.

And Section 3, which allows a regional Board of Education to deposit up to 2% of the annual district budget into a non-lapsing account. This provision supports fiscal responsibility and it is consistent with the statute allowing local Boards of Education to carry over funds.

CABE also supports House Bill 6619, which requires the Department of Education to develop a model curriculum that may be used by Boards of Education. The development of the model curriculum would reduce duplication of effort at the local level and provide a resource that Boards of Education could adopt or modify as appropriate.

CABE also supports Senate Bill 1034, which is AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. The lack of minority representation now

in public schools is an issue of concern to all districts in Connecticut. We want our students to have an opportunity to learn from educators from a variety of backgrounds, races, and cultures. While progress has been made in increasing the number of educators of color, much work remains to be done. Currently, students of color account for over 40% of the Connecticut students' population while only 5.6% of the State public school teachers and administrators are people of color.

CABE has adopted a position urging all districts to continue their effort to increase the recruitment of qualified individuals who reflect the State's diversity to teach in professional administration. CABE has established a Diversity Equity Inclusion Committee to address these issues, as well as a lack of diversity on all Boards of Education. Some of the work of that Committee has been to support local Boards of Education --

BETH REGAN: [crosstalk] --

LEONARD LOCKHART: I'm sorry.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Someone didn't have their computer on mute, continue.

LEONARD LOCKHART: I'm sorry. There are specific programs, such as Relay, and RESC Alliance teacher residency program which some connected districts are using to enable staff to become certified educators. CABE has adopted a position of urging all districts to continue to efforts to increase recruitment of qualified individuals who reflect the State's diversity to teaching professional administration.

CABE also urges you to support this and other initiatives to recruit and retain minority educators and to commit the resources needed for successful implementation.

And finally, CAFE supports the efforts to address the critical issues of literacy. As you consider House Bill 6620, and the responsibility of places on the State Department of Education, we strongly urge you to ensure that the resources are available for successful implementation on a long-term basis.

The State Department of Education has been seriously understaffed for a number of years and that challenge grows each year. Without a commitment to sustain resources to capacity to implement the important work on a long-term basis will not be available. The -- we know that the reading is a gate -- We know that reading is a gateway skill to all other learning and that learning to read is critical -- is very critical and to the ability to read to learn. The learning disruption created by the pandemic has been exacerbated by the existing gap in reading attained.

We appreciate your attention to these issues and a copy of this testimony will be emailed to the Committee, as well.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Leonard. I don't see any hands up at the moment. No. I thank you, thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I would just add, Leonard. Thank you for your work as Chair of the Education Committee out in Windsor. I think you guys did an outstanding job selecting your new superintendent. I look for great things to come out of Windsor and I look forward to working with you all as we move forward. Thank you.

LEONARD LOCKHART: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I will share that with our new superintendent. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Who do we have next, Representative Sanchez?

We can go to Michelle Embree, number 20.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Michelle, you're up.

MICHELLE EMBREE KU: Hi. Thank you, Chair McCrory, Chair Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, Distinguished Members of the Education Committee. I am Michelle Embree Ku, Chair of both the Newtown Board of Education and the CAFE State Relations Committee.

I'd like to elaborate on Mr. Lockhart's testimony on SB 1033, Section 1. CAFE is opposed, as he mentioned, to the addition of financial literacy as a specific graduation requirement. We recognize the importance of financial literacy to the success of students beyond high school, yet when the new high school graduation requirements were revised in 2017, there was extensive discussion of the course work that would be prescribed in statute. And that was carefully balanced with the need to allow student interests to play a role in their course choices.

The Connecticut General Assembly wisely created a graduation diploma system that prepares all students for the future of their choosing, while allowing local districts, schools, and students the flexibility to create a wide variety of learning pathways.

Additionally, Boards of Education have changed budgets and curriculum and students have mapped out their high school course plan in response to the 2017 new requirements for the graduating class of 2023. And this may throw a wrench in those students' course plans, as well as district curriculum writing.

I thank you for your consideration today and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There are no hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, again, thank you for your testimony. We are going to move right along with our next presenter.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Next one is Gabriela Acta.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Followed by Marlene Megos. And then Wilson Hernandez.

GABRIELA ACTA: How are you guys this morning? Well, afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Gabriela, oh, there you are. Okay. You have the floor.

GABRIELA ACTA: Okay. I would like to give thanks to the Education Committee. Especially to the Chair, Bobby Sanchez, for all of the amazing work that you do and for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

I am here to support on behalf of the House Bill 6616, that helps clarify how charter schools in Connecticut are funded in a fair way. Danbury deserves to have more educational options so that parents can choose what school they want their children to attend to. And I understand that in this day and age, everything is about politics, but I'm here to say that our student education shouldn't be guided by politics. We should ensure that all of our communities have access to high quality schools.

I am a product of the Danbury public school system and I graduated from Danbury High in 2019. A school that will soon have over 3,000 students and already had met -- and already seemed to have more when I was there. It is a school where you can easily get lost and misguided, and I barely saw any Latino teachers or teachers of color and administrators that I could talk to or relate to. I'm here to tell

you that it matters and it matters to students like myself, that we have educational leaders that look like us and that we can connect to.

My mom didn't really have any other educational choices that fit her needs so I had to go to Danbury High School. I would have loved to have a school like Danbury Prospect, where I could have had a more diverse teaching staff, smaller classrooms and environment and another high-quality education opportunity. I and many like myself never had the chance, and I hope that you could help me and many in our communities, as we strive to ensure that future generations get the opportunity to receive a higher quality education.

In Danbury, we have been fighting to open up a charter school to have at least one option for our families. The school has been continuously blocked by our local legislators due to politics. And I wanted to give my support for the House Bill 6616 and I assure that it contains the necessary funds to allow us to open a new charter school in Danbury. I want to ensure that our community in Danbury can clearly see that you have our backs. And thank you so much for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. So nice to meet you, Gabriela. I wanted to ask you, in your testimony, you said, you know, everything is about politics and due to politics, Danbury didn't open. Could you help me understand what you mean by that?

GABRIELA ACTA: What I mean by that when that everything is about more than -- it's been about politics and not opening the school. When it comes

to like funding with certain things in educational systems, I know is usually a discussion topic.

And I know that already the new Danbury High School already had funding to make it bigger, but even that is not big enough to hold the students. So I know that even from when I was in high school, they had tried to fight to open another school and they always the legislators and stuff like that would be holding it back and I always you know at the time, I didn't understand why. But I think that politics are just getting -- Like funding and all that, things are running getting in the way of thinking about kids education, which I think is more important.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Right. And you said there's only one option in Danbury. Could you explain that, too? Or you said there are few options?

GABRIELA ACTA: For kids in Danbury coming from -- so there's like there's two middle schools and there's I think multiple elementary schools, and the only options that kids usually have is like Danbury High School, of course there's Immaculate, but that is also Catholic high school, so. Also, that you need to get into that school, along with Abbott Tech, which not only has kids coming in from Danbury but from surrounding towns. And it's very hard to get into.

That's why I think that there should be a Danbury charter school, so that kids who either aren't Catholic so they can't go to Immaculate or they can't get into Abbott Tech because that's not something they want to pursue or something that can't get into due to the different amount of people trying to get into it from surrounding towns, have another option, where it isn't overcrowded and they have the ability to want to talk to their teachers and feel comfortable in the environment that they're in.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Gabriela. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your question. Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you and thank you, Gabriela, for being here today. You know, I am the Senator from Danbury so I appreciate seeing folks when they come to testify before this body. I wanted just to ask you if you've been following some of the developments in Danbury regarding the New Career Academy that would accommodate 1,400 seats, Students in Danbury from Grades six to 12, and whether that's something you've been hearing about, because it would also provide some options for students in Danbury, which we're really excited about.

The Legislature approved funding the school construction reimbursing Danbury for school construction last summer. And hopefully, we'll have a Bill on that this year and be able to move the career academies forward. Are you familiar with that?

GABRIELAL ACTA: Yes, I'm a little familiar with that topic. I just wanted to further talk about this topic due to -- It has 1,400 seats, but since it goes all the way down to the middle school and since all -- either way there's still only two middle schools, along with the 3,000 students that are coming into Danbury High School. There are also students who now, because Abbott Tech's acceptance rate is lower, it maybe more than that. So, I agree that that's a good idea, but I still wanted to pitch the idea due to the fact that there's still more space that is needed.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you for that answer. And I do want to also ask you about -- there is a Bill that -- I don't know if you've been listening today, but there's a Bill that -- Senate Bill No.

1034, it's something that I strongly support, which would be concerning minority teacher recruitment and retention, which I think you touched upon a little bit, but that is something else that we're trying to address as a legislature. Based on your testimony, I assume you would be supportive of that, as well.

GABRIELA ACTA: Absolutely, yes. I am in support of that Bill.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Great. Thank you so much. Thank you, Senator McCrory. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing you to ask those questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. There's no more hands up, Doug.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. So we'll go to -- next up is Marlene Megos, followed by Wilson Hernandez, followed by Jonathan Weiner.

MARLENE MEGOS: Good afternoon, Honorable Chairman Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Marlene Megos and I am the Director of the Connecticut Teacher Residency program, in partnership with the RESC Alliance.

As you have heard before the Connecticut Teacher Residency program launched in the summer of 2019 and is specifically designed to eliminate the most common barriers to certification for candidates of color.

I am here today in support of Senate Bill No. 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION with necessary amendments.

In our interviews for this program yesterday and today, I have heard from candidates over and over

again about their commitment to education, their deep desires to become a teacher and their experiences with few teachers of color in their schools. This is no surprise to me as I only had one teacher of color in my K-12 experience growing up in Meriden, Connecticut and have witnessed this time and time again in districts I have worked in my own community now of West Hartford.

I am committed to this program and support this Bill as a way to amplify the voices of our Black and Brown colleagues and help Connecticut meet its commitment to increasing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Connecticut's teaching workforce. CTTRP is a residency program that would be supported by this Bill. Our residency program requires candidates to take classes and work side-by-side with a mentor teacher having hands-on authentic experiences, while receiving pay and benefits as a teacher's assistant or a para. In this vein, we would suggest modifying the definition of residency program to ensure that we are maximizing the qualified number of candidates, such as ours.

In furtherance of that objective, we suggest changing "and" to "or" in Section 1(A)3 as follows: "A residency in which such participants serve (a) in a position requiring professional certification; or (b) in a full-time position for 10 school months at a local regional board in this State under the supervision of a certified administrator or a teacher." and so on.

As we plan to offer this program across Connecticut, we are up-front that the residency model requires dedicated funding of approximately 73,000 per resident for tuition, materials, training, salary, and benefits. Many districts cannot add this to their already stretched budgets. While we appreciate the funding mechanism included in the Bill, currently 17 of our 25 --

DALLAS EMERLE: You've run your two and a half minutes. If you wouldn't mind summarizing.

MARLENE MEGOS: Thank you. Seventeen of our 25 partner districts are not Alliance Districts and it seem, it would be difficult for these committed districts to benefit from this legislation, as drafted.

In addition, using this funding mechanism could strain Alliance Districts. We ask that you incorporate a \$4.5 million into the general fund line item to be included with the STE budget for purposes of funding residency programs and assist us with training 16 new teachers of color in the coming year. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I wish you all a Happy St. Patrick's Day.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Great, thank you, Marlene. Thank you so much. I don't see any hands raised so thank you again for your testimony today.

MARLENE MEGOS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Wilson Hernandez. Is Wilson Hernandez on? Wilson Hernandez.

WILSON HERNANDEZ: I'm here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Can you turn your camera on, Wilson?

WILSON HERNANDEZ: Yes, let me do it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you go. Thank you.

WILSON HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel and Representative McCarty, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Wilson Hernandez and I am a -- I am from Danbury. I am here to speak in opposition to Bill HB 6616. We

don't want a charter school in our city. If this Bill was the law, there will be no way for me to address the General Assembly about a school, like the Embree Prospect coming into my community.

I am a proud supporter of Danbury public schools. As an immigrant, I understand the value of access to a quality public school education for every student. I want our efforts to go towards supporting Danbury public schools and all of our students and I don't want a charter school coming into Danbury.

I don't want a school in my city that's only available to some of the students. I don't want a school in my city, that does not answer to local elected officials. I don't want our Danbury public schools to be -- I want our Danbury public schools to be fully-funded. I also want to voice my support for SB 1034 about minority teachers' recruitment because it's important to have teachers who represent our community in our schools.

Our students need to see teachers and leaders who look like them, and I think the General Assembly should take these steps to support these actions for the schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Hernandez. Senator Kushner has a question.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you. Thank you, Wilson, for testifying here today and it's good to see you.

WILSON HERNANDEZ: Thank you so much, Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): I just wanted to thank you in particular. I wanted my colleagues to know that Wilson has been one of the long-standing leaders in our community, of the Ecuadorian Community and was

formerly the President of the Ecuadorian Civic Center, and so I know this is an issue that you have spent a lot of time thinking about in Danbury public schools.

And if you had to say that, you know, you have children -- I know you live very nearby one of our best public schools, the Morris Street School, and I just wondered if there was anything you wanted to add that would tell us what you think we need most to do in Danbury to improve education for all of our students?

WILSON HERNANDEZ: First of all, I think we should not have charter schools in Danbury that's going to serve only 10% or 12% or 15%. We need to support our, you know, our students at 100%. All of our children need to get the greatest education that they can. And I am, you know, as a taxpayer, even though I don't have my grandchildren here, my two children are grown-up boys, but I want the greatest education that we can for every single children in Connecticut. And especially, in Danbury.

This multicultural, multi-ethnic city needs to provide our kids with the best education that we can because they are the future for Danbury, they are the future for Connecticut. And also, I think that we should support the recruitment of teachers with different backgrounds. Bilingual teachers, Latino teachers, more Afro-American teachers. Because our students need to see that their teachers are normal, that they can follow. And we only have, you know, teachers that reflect something that we think we don't belong to. We think that we cannot achieve the success that others are achieving.

So I will ask all the Members of the Education Committee to consider the fact that we need - we need better schools in Danbury. Obviously, our public schools are good but we need them to be much better. I would love to see this Career Academy in Danbury being, you know, implemented as soon as

possible. Another 1,400 children can get great education but I don't want a charter school here. Not only because I don't want, but because people who are well-informed in Danbury, especially among the Ecuadorian Community, which is a large community, think that the -- you know if only 110 students can go to the charter school district, what's going to happen with the other thousands of kids? This should not be a matter of being lucky and winning a lottery ticket. Education, it's not about being lucky. It's about receiving the greatest education that we can. Not only because our elected officials want it, but because the whole entire community should support that.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Thank you so much, Wilson. And again, I appreciate all your service in Danbury, for the whole community, and your leadership, so really appreciate having you here today. Thank you, Chairman Sanchez.

WILSON HERNANDEZ: Thank you, Julie.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Senator. That is the last person with a question. Thank you, Mr. Hernandez. Thank you for your testimony today.

WILSON HERNANDEZ: Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We move on to Jonathan Weiner. Jonathan? Oh, yeah, I do see you. You have the floor.

JONATHAN WEINER: Yes. Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel and Honorable Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for having me here today. My name is Jonathan Weiner. I am Chair of the Connecticut Bar Association's Civics Education Committee and President of the Board of Civics First, which is a non-profit organization that works with the Bar and the Bench to provide civics education programs to

students in Connecticut's public and private schools.

I'm here to testify in reference to House Bill No. 6619, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A KINDERGARTEN THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE MODEL CURRICULUM, particularly as it relates to instruction and civics education. I'm also here to urge the addition of language from House Bill 6139 to this Bill.

We believe that it's critical to lay the groundwork for an active engaged citizenry, starting with our state's youngest students. Section 1(B) of the Bill requires the model curriculum to include instruction in social studies, including citizenship and government. A report published a few weeks ago by the Educating for American Democracy initiative has provided a guidance for improving the teaching of civics education. By an inquiry-based model that asked students to understand how our democratic institutions work, along with their role in these institutions, the time is now.

As the EAD report states, civics and history education has eroded in the United States over the past 50 years and opportunities to learn these subjects are inequitably distributed. Dangerously low proportions of the public understand and trust our democratic institutions majorities are functionally illiterate on our constitutional principles and forms. The relative neglect of civic education in the past half century is one important cause of our civic and political dysfunction.

As Representative Smith said earlier, I would agree that one need only look to the tragic events at United States Capitol on January 6th as a symptom of the social illness caused by the decline in civics education nationally. This tragedy was the unsurprising result of a surge in voter participation, accompanied by a similar surge in voter misinformation that was decades in the making,

as a result of the decline of American civics education.

Connecticut is well-positioned to assess and improve our students' education. We have a diverse array of organizations that are devoted to making Civics Education accessible and exciting. With many programs oriented to students in Grades K-through-Eight. For example, Civics First organizes middle school debate and mock trial competitions, which teach students, how to research and engage.

DALLAS EMERLE: Sir, that's your two and a half minutes. If you wouldn't mind summarizing.

JONATHAN WEINER: Sure. Either in the context of a court case where the discussion of a contemporary issue the Connecticut Bar Association's young lawyers, Section 1, Lawyers in the Classroom, which sends volunteer attorneys to elementary school classrooms to engage with students about the rule of law. And finally, our friends with the Connecticut Democracy Center, which has also submitted written testimony today sponsor the very popular Kid Governor election for fifth-graders each year.

The leadership of these organizations stands ready to partner with you, the Department of Education, and our state's teachers to support a bipartisan working group to examine how Civics Education is taught in our state's public schools. This working group has proposed earlier in the session as a legislator Task Force by Representative Smith House Bill No. 6139, which was endorsed by the Connecticut Bar Association. And recently supported today by the Secretary of State in written testimony.

We urge the additional language from House Bill 6139 to this to the education curriculum Bill, and in any form, we look forward to supporting a case week curriculum, it will foster informed and active future generations.

Thank you for your time and I will forward written testimony to the Committee by tomorrow.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. Thank you so much, Jon, and I look forward to seeing the written testimony and any other information on Civics that you can provide us. Because I've had this discussion with Representative Smith and I look forward to see how we can include some language into the model curriculum Bill. Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (118TH): Here. Thank you, Representative Sanchez. And thank you, Mr. Weiner, for your eloquent testimony and for referencing my proposed language. You've obviously been immersed in Civics Education in the State and have a good overview. What is the current state requirements or Civic Education now?

JONATHAN WEINER: Currently, the only statewide requirement is that students can complete one-half credit which is basically a semester of Civics Education as a condition of high school graduation. There is no current state requirement for the younger grades. And our position is that requirements for the younger grades will lay the groundwork to make that semester of education more effective once they do reach high school.

REP. SMITH (118TH): And if I may, Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Weiner is, do you know how that compares with other jurisdictions or other states?

JONATHAN WEINER: It's right in the middle. Some states require a full year. Other states have actually required the United States Citizenship Test be administered as a condition of high school graduation. You know, I think Connecticut has a strong tradition of local control among 169 towns in the various regions. So I think we would have to be cognizant of that tradition in terms of backing any kind of statewide requirements, but I would say right now we're in the middle.

One thing we have seen is that our students who take the AP History course and the AP Government course perform very strongly compared to the rest of the state -- to the rest of the country.

REP. SMITH (118TH): It is interesting, because even the Secretary of State's testimony references the fact that only four out of 10 fellow citizens can complete the Citizenship Test that is given to all new citizens of this country, which is a very low percentage considering our native-born citizens don't know as much about our government as people arriving here in our immigration offices, so I think that's something to ponder.

JONATHAN WEINER: To be honest, I'm surprised that it's that high. In a recent study only 26% of Americans could identify the three branches of government.

REP. SMITH (118TH): Yeah, it's also reported in here as well. Appreciate it. Thank you very much, Mr. Weiner. I appreciate your testimony and your insight.

JONATHAN WEINER: No, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. We have one more question from Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): I'm sorry, not a question. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to tell you, Mr. Weiner, that I'm very excited about your Civics First program and I really appreciate the work you're doing on this topic, so thank you.

JONATHAN WEINER: Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. I don't see any other questions. Thank you, Mr. Weiner, for your on your testimony today.

JONATHAN WEINER: Sure, and thank you for your time today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, we have Stephen Hegedus. Followed by Amy Roberts. Is Stephen on? I see you, Stephen.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Hi, can you hear me?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I can hear you.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Okay, great. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, Esteemed Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in opposition to state [sic] Bill 1035, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRE-SERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

My name is Stephen Hegedus. I'm the Dean of the College of Education at Southern Connecticut State University, the current president of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association for Colleges for Teacher ED and a group of 12 Connecticut public and private universities involved in education -- educator preparation programs.

We are opposed to this Bill for a variety of reasons. First, NTPA is a valid pre-assessment test that helps to credibly measure a student-teacher's ability to teach in the classroom. NTPA is a performance-based assessment, which is built on the core aspects of teaching, such as planning for instruction engaging students in learning, assessing learning, and supporting academic language development.

This pre-service performance assessment aligns with the Educator Preparation Advisory Council, the EPAC principles, as well as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, CAEP,

standards which we are -- have to comply with as part of our national accreditation, as well as other statutory requirements. The pre-assessment was adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education in 2016 based upon the EPAC recommendations. After several years of thorough review analysis and input from professional education organizations, representatives from pre-K-12 schools, education institutions, administrators, and faculty to develop programs to properly prepare their students to align with the objectives of NTPA. I was actually a Member of the EPAC sub-committee that looked at a variety of assessments at the time and brought our proposals forward to the Connecticut State Board of Ed.

If this legislation were to become law, it would force our EPPs to incur significant costs and divert resources away towards creating and implementing another reliable pre-service assessment tool. This would occur at a time when our resources, our finances and otherwise are stretched very thin. Therefore, if this Bill does move forward, we are requesting that all EPP programs both private and public be provided the option to continue to use NTPA if they so choose and not be mandated to adopt another type of pre-service assessment as recommended in this Bill.

Also we want to point out that Section 2 of the Bill does not include any involvement of the private colleges. Thank you. The private colleges and universities in the development of another type of pre-service performance assessment, Section 2 only includes the President of BR, the Dean of UConn, the next School of Education, and the Commissioner of Education. Should this Bill move forward, private colleges and universities with the EPPs must be included so they're equally involved in the education and training about future teacher workforce.

And finally, the General Assembly had created a working group, Public 19-139, that studied these related to implementing the NTPA pre-service teacher performance assessment. The working group produced its final report with a variety of recommendations and that did not include the elimination of the NTPA. We understand the significant costs that occur, and also to our students and this morning, Chris Todd and the Commission presented also the need to offset some of these costs through other kinds of funds, as well as scholarships for our students, so we're fully aware of that need as well.

Thank you, for the aforementioned reasons, we do not support this Bill today. I thankfully respect your time and I'm welcoming to try and answer any questions you may have.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony and, you know, I think I've mentioned this before. My concern is -- one of the concerns is the costs on to the students and so I would really, really -- if this Bill does not move forward and NTPA is to stay on, I would like to see the elimination of the cost to the student. If that's something that's workable, then you know, that's something we can have a discussion on later.

I don't see any hands up at the moment, so thank -- Thank you so much for your testimony today.

STEPHEN HEGEDUS: Thank you very much, Representative. Thank you all.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Sanchez, I'm just going to call the next three names, so people will be ready.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I believe the next person is up is Amy Roberts, followed by Jason Morris,

followed by Juan Fonseca Tapia. You three are the next up.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And I see Amy Roberts you. Amy, you have the floor.

AMY ROBERTS: Hello. Good afternoon, and thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and all the Honorable Members of the Committee. I really appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Amy Roberts. I'm the Director of State Government Affairs at co.org. For those who are unfamiliar, co.org is a non-profit dedicated to expanding access to computer science education and increasing participation by women in under-represented racial and ethnic groups. We believe truly that every student in every school should have the opportunity to learn computer science.

I'm speaking today in support of raised Bill 1033, a Bill that would allow computer science to count as a STEM credit for high school graduation requirements. Computing is a foundational skill for all K-12 students. It develops students' computational and critical thinking skills and teaches them how to create, not just use, technologies.

Currently 67% of high schools and Connecticut teach a foundational course in computer science, but when we look a little deeper at access to computer science, a few things stand out. Computer science is available in only 40% of economically-challenged high schools. 64% of Black students and 71% of Hispanic students attend a high school that offers computer science. Compare that to 83% of white students. If we look a little more closely, our participation, Black African-American students are 2.7 times less likely and Hispanic students are 2.4 times less likely than their white and Asian peers, to take an APCS exam when they attend a school that offers it.

Expanding access and increasing participation in computer science education equitably is essential if we want all children to have the skills they need to compete and succeed in the global economy. Our students aren't just competing with the kids from across the hall or across town or across the country even, they're competing with students from across the globe for skills that will empower the jobs and industries of the future. Computing occupations have become the single largest source of new wages in the US with open jobs growing at twice the rate of other jobs.

In Connecticut alone there are over 4,000 open computing positions right now. That's 2.6 times the state average. They have an average salary of over \$100,000. But in 2018, there were only 564 computer science graduates. The policy encouraged by this Bill will better prepare Connecticut students for high-paying in-demand careers and position Connecticut as a national leader in K-12 computer science education. States that count computer science as a core graduation requirement see 50% more enrollment in their AP computer science courses and increased participation by students from under-represented racial and ethnic groups.

Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I welcome any questions and we have submitted written testimony, as well.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Amy, thank you for your testimony, Amy. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, again, thank you for your testimony, Amy.

AMY ROBERTS: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Up next, Jason -- Jason Morris, followed by Juan, followed by Erica Biagetti.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Jason? There you are.

JASON MORRIS: Hello, good afternoon. Co-Chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, Vice-Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Barry and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Jason Morris. I'm a parent of three wonderful children, one of whom graduated high school in Connecticut last year. I'm a Co-founder of a successful informal local education group, the New London Parent Advocates, that went on to become Step Up New London, an important non-profit inner-city state.

I speak for myself today. I wish to express my strong opposition for HB 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, in its current form. And I urge you to reconsider the language in this important legislation.

Unlike the majority of organizations that will simply point out the academic achievement, quote unquote, of our students based on student test scores, I will state clearly that those scores are a measure of household income, not student ability or even teacher effectiveness. They just aren't, when 60% of the score is based on outer-school factors. They are a cruel joke and have punished poor districts for decades now. I start with that, because the testimony here today that will -- that which you will read -- and that which you will read will include points using those scores.

The opportunity gap is mostly based on the huge income inequality we have in our state and the country. And the red-lining that resulted in our terribly fragmented education system in Connecticut, making our quality of education based on your zip code. This reality means we can't take a one-size-fits all approach like we have too often. We can't be colorblind because when we are blind, we are -- we blind ourselves to the deep racial disparities

our inherently racist education systems have perpetuated.

I am not a colleague of and not directly related to another citizen who has submitted written testimony today, but I wholeheartedly support their testimony. A district leader in New Haven, Ivelise Velasquez, has written a detailed, thoughtful, and informed critique of the Bill with recommended changes, and I urge all of you to read it a couple of times to really absorb the wealth of experience she has shared with our state today. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you and thank you for your testimony. I have a question. You don't support 6620?

JASON MORRIS: In its current form.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): In its current form. Can you, within one minute, tell me the changes you'd like to see? And the only reason I ask that is because you reference the assessment results are largely based on parent incomes and you reference the fact that this particular piece of legislation needs work. And, as you know, for the -- since we've been taking score and in Connecticut the last 35 years, since '86 when we started testing, we've noticed there a population of students who completely fall well below what, quote unquote, is considered a passing score. And it's been that way for 35 years. And this is an attempt by the Members of this legislative body to do something different. So just within one minute, and I don't want to keep you long because I know we got 75 other people to speak.

Within one minute, what are the changes that you'd like to see to this piece of legislation? Because I feel as though we cannot go back to what we continue to do with these and we have done because it hasn't been successful. So in one minute, can you sum up

what would are the changes would you like to see?
And then we can go on.

JASON MORRIS: I agree, we cannot continue with what we currently have, but the issue is that this Bill does not -- it is one-size-fits-all, it is colorblind, it does not address the economic disparities that we have across the education system. It brings this Center or I'm sorry Center for Research and -- I don't have the name right in front of me. It gives me an outside third-party organization, a private organization, too much power on our system to get them to approve curriculum. Where instead it should just be recommended, and we need to have the State Board of Education working directly with local districts, to get curriculums and interventions that are best for those districts.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, all right. Thank you. I'll just, and this is not a question, it's just a comment. As I read that -- this proposal, it provides five different options. Research-based, scientifically proven strategies to teach reading. So it's not a one-size-fits-all, that is clear. So that's not a question, just my observation of reading the Bill, and being an educator for 30 years.

But I thank you for your testimony any other questions from the Committee? Any other questions from the Committee? Okay, seeing none, we'll move on. Next up, Juan, followed by Erica, followed by Ashley Gibson.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Juan. Juan Fonseca Tapia. Okay, well, Juan Fonseca Tapia. Okay, so we'll move on to -- We'll move on to Erica because I don't -- I see Juan's name here, but I don't see him up on the screen. Erica, you're next.

ERICA BIAGETTI: Great. Thank you so much. Thank you very much for having me here today. I want to thank the Education Committee, all the Chairs and

the Honorable Members. My name is Erica Biagetti. I am the President of -- for 2020-2021 for the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, as well as the director of dining services for Guilford Public Schools. And I'm here today supporting House Bill No. 6621 AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS IN ADDITION TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES.

I'm focusing on Section 3 for Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids. Connecticut school nutrition professionals serve meals that are healthy and nutritious and our meals are enhanced by fresh local fruits and vegetables. Our programs serve as an important gateway to introducing children to healthy eating and smart food choices. Children who are introduced to fresh local foods in their school cafeteria and who have hands-on experiences in school gardens, are more willing to consume fresh -- more fruits and vegetables. And learn more about agriculture and bring information about fruits and vegetables into their daily lives outside of school.

Connecting children to local foods, gardens and farms has positive long-lasting educational, health and economic impacts. Despite the pandemic, some districts have managed to continue to bring fresh produce and maintain their school gardens, but there is much rebuilding that needs to occur. Our school nutrition programs begin to emerge from the pandemic having Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids grants will help strengthening these existing connection and enable more schools and districts to participate in Connecticut-Grown programs.

I know some of the amazing features that the Connecticut-Grown is actually connecting students and getting farm visits, which works better than going out and seeing cows actually get milk. And seeing what's actually happening on the farms where a lot of students don't have that ability to connect or know where their fruits and vegetables come from or how things are grown and what goes into all the aspects of fresh fruits and vegetables and how that

appears on their plates in their grocery stores. And it is a tremendous way to help us continue to support all of our local Connecticut farms who have been suffering through this pandemic, as well as a lot of the foodservice programs.

So we think that this is a great endeavor to be able to continue this strong program and focusing on Connecticut and bringing a lot of education back to the students, as well as to the farmers and giving them the opportunity to show the amazing work that they do as well. And highlight all of our Connecticut produce, because we have so much and are available. I know here in Guilford and Bishops has delicious apples.

So I want to thank you all and I'm available for any questions that anyone may have.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I just want to make a quick comment. Erica, thank you so much for the work that you do. And it would be wonderful if we can get Connecticut-Grown, you know, the farmers to be the key -- The key to food to supplying the fruits and vegetables in our school systems throughout the State of Connecticut, wouldn't that be great?

ERICA BIAGETTI: That would be wonderful. That's actually something that has been talked about at the table -- as being able to use some of our resources to be able to bring it right back to Connecticut and have it featured on our local farms and using our funding in that way. It's tremendous. That would be a great accomplishment.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): It'd just be great to see more veggies and more fruit on -- in the kids' lunch on a daily basis. It's so healthy and it just makes it just makes common sense, but thank you so much for your testimony today.

ERICA BIAGETTI: Thank you, everyone, I appreciate it. Have a wonderful day.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, thank you. Next up, we have Ashley Gibson, followed by Jose Pimentel, followed by Douglas Mills. Ashley?

ASHLEY GIBSON: Hello, how are you?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We're well. How are you?

ASHLEY GIBSON: Wonderful, thank you for asking. Thank you for having me, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee. I'm Ashley Gibson, here on behalf of the College Board. As a mission-driven, not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success, we welcome the opportunity to share comments and support of Raised Bill 1033, a Bill that would connect -- a Bill that would allow computer science to count as a STEM credit for high school graduation requirements.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with Connecticut to help bring computer science coursework to even more students in every corner of the State through this Bill. One of the ways the College Board is already doing this work is through our newest AP course, AP computer science principles, APCSP for short.

The APCSP course changes the invitation to computer science education by engaging traditionally under-represented students. We believe that providing a more diverse group of students with access to computer science courses is imperative to increasing access to the computer science fields high-paying, fast-paced jobs and to drive innovation, creativity, and competitiveness.

I've provided written testimony with Connecticut-specific numbers around computer science, but I want to share the latest research findings for APCSP that

we think will underscore the importance of the State's effort to expand computer science access.

The College Board finds students who took APCSP in high school were more than three times as likely to major in computer science in college, compared to similar students who did not take APCSP. These results held true for female, Black, Hispanic, and first-generation college students and in fact, Black students who took APCSP then majored in computer science at higher rates than students from any other racial or ethnic group. APCSP students are near -- are nearly twice as likely to enroll in an AP computer science a course, which is a more program-focused course than students who did not take APCSP does notable -- notably reducing APCSP as a race and ethnicity enrollment gaps.

And APCSP may serve as a stepping stone to other advanced STEM coursework. For the Class of 2019, more than half of the students who took APCSP were then -- were taking their first AP STEM course. The number of Black, Hispanic, and first-generation students was even higher.

In closing, we would like to reiterate our support for Raised Bill 1033 and look forward to working with you, along with districts and schools to expand access to and participate in computer science courses. I'm happy to take any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hey. Thank you, Ashley, for your testimony. I don't see any hands up, so thank you so much for your testimony, Ashley.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Ashley.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have Jose.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Following by Douglas Mills and followed by Karline Augustin.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Augustin, yes. Hi, Jose how are you?

JOSE PIMENTEL: Hey. Thank you. Thank you, Chair Sanchez, and McCrory for this wonderful opportunity to testify. Thank you for all the leadership. And there was a point where I felt almost homeless, but the Black Latino Caucus and some of the leaders have told us that we do have representation.

First, I'm here again to just support House Bill 6616, AN ACT CONCERNING CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING. I do believe that the stages really need to work into a fair funding formula, so that, you know, communities of color and people like what happened to Danbury, it doesn't happen again. We have been fighting now for seven years to open a charter school. We got approved in 2018 and we only have three years, literally, just you know, locking horns with local politicians and we don't think that that should ever happen to anyone again so we want to ensure that this Bill passes, but that it also has funds, just like the Commissioner mentioned. Don't give someone an empty account and cause the same issue.

We believe that it should be funded to allow the charters that were approved to move forward and then in the future, there is another way to always say, you know, with some other formula, how have the funds go in there? I mean, is it going to be always political or is there a nice fair way for the Commissioner to have that? I think the legislature and the Commissioner working together.

I think in Danbury we have seen, and today I was, I was -- I was about to rain fire again, but I realized, you know I did enough of that. And I don't think I want to keep fighting my Senator and fighting our people. Our communities now is almost divided because, you know, the other side needs to have some other allies and most of them are politicians to come and do this and I don't think it

helps. But I applaud the House Bill that is about to go forward, I think it's a step forward. I want to be a person that is helping you guys, helping ourselves to move forward to work together. Lead was grown an organization to advocate for more equity. I love all of the Bills supporting Native Americans, supporting all of those things and equity, we just don't want to be ignored in Danbury again. Whatever happened was just because of the way that the laws were set. We just want to make sure that we fixed that in the future so that doesn't happen. So I want to again say thank you for all of your leadership and thank you for everything you have done for us.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. I will thank you, Jose. I just wanted to -- just make a comment on -- so, you know I -- you know, in the last two years, I did visit Danbury. I was able to speak to the to the leadership of lead, and many of the, you know, parents down there that want to see this charter school open in Danbury.

Just in an estimated amount, what are you looking for in regards to funding and what grades are we talking about in regards to this charter school that your group wants to open up in Danbury?

JOSE PIMENTEL: Our charter eventually is going to be from Grade six through 12. We're going to grow 110 students a year. We needed 1.2 million just to start the school. We're ready to start in 2019. We also have the donation of \$25 million dollars for our own building and other commitments if we need -- if we need that, so we need 1.2 million to open a school. And again, the school will grow at its largest capacity to 770 students. And I think that even 10%, it's a start, you know. People are saying that that's not enough but it's like a burning building, right. If you can save 10 out of 100, you shouldn't let them all die. So we think that we can start opening our school with 1.2 million, that's what we need.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So 1.2 million would cover -- I don't think it will cover Grades Six through 12, though, right?

JOSE PIMENTEL: Oh, it's just to open. We haven't been able to open, once we're open, then we're part of the normal, you know, any other charter school that's open. Right now, that was the opening money that we needed to begin and that's what's basically has us on hold. We cannot use them donation that we have, we can't use anything, because we that 1.2 million, we have not been able to get.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. I just wanted a little clarity on that. Representative Callahan.

REP. CALLAHAN (108TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Pimentel, for coming in today. I've been in other committee meetings but I've been watching the computer screen looking for you. So I appreciate you coming in, and I look forward to speaking with you about this in the -- in the very near future.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Right. Thank you, Representative Callahan. Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Quick question for you and I apologize, I was in another meeting so I just came in at the tail end of your testimony and was listening to the question Chairman Sanchez was asking you with regards to that over \$1 million. Does that -- to get you started, does that require you to build? You have an actual location and actual building where -- ?

JOSE PIMENTEL: We actually have a location and we have the money to build the school.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Okay, and so --

JOSE PIMENTEL: It was across the street from my house which is pretty great.

REP. CURREY (11TH): New monies would get you -- now you said "started", so I mean obviously, I'm assuming you're aware of the approval process, and this will get you the grades that you're looking for, but anything beyond that would still need to be further approved by the appropriate entity.

JOSE PIMENTEL: We got -- we got approved for the initial five grades, six through 10 and then after 10, then they would add the other two grades, because we would like our kids to graduate from our school. Right now. We do something that --

REP. CURREY (11TH): Has been approved or you'd have to go back for that approval?

JOSE PIMENTEL: We have the State Department of Education approved in ,2018 we just never got the funds allocated. So we have the charter approved, we just don't have the state funds to be able to be active.

REP. CURREY (11TH): But again it's only approved up to 10, so anything beyond that you'd have to go back to the State Board and go through the whole process -- ?

JOSE PIMENTEL: In five years, yes.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Okay, all right. I'll just say, you know, obviously, you know many of us are supporters of providing choice and making sure that if we're going to do so, we do so in an equitable manner. And so I you know applaud your continued fight, and we will see how this turns out Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hi, Mr. Pimentel. I wanted to ask you how are our charters currently funded and how does this change that and do you have suggestions on where the funding can come from for the general fund? We have another Bill about private donations tax-free accruing in a scholarship fund. What are you thinking for this general fund legislation?

JOSE PIMENTEL: Charter schools, right now, are funded through a line item. That line item actually has \$4.6 million that's about to lapse on June 30th. We are thinking that because we're having an account for the Commissioner, why allow that money to fund that would not allow us to increase and near the budget. We don't have to increase anything, you know. Like a lot of people were screaming. Well more spending that money is already there. We're asking for that to be actually part of the House Bill 6616, so that it starts with some funds for those 16 schools.

I love what you mentioned. We were able to get donations of millions if we were able to have private donations to be able to also help the State, not only keep costs down, but actually improve more educational choices, that will be amazing if this funds actually -- if this account actually had a provision to be able to take some of that money, we might be able to actually fund ourselves. Because I don't think right now, even if we have people that want to give them money, they don't have any mechanism to do so, so that's a great idea.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, thank you and Jose, thank you for your testimony. I just want to add that I think this Bill was very important, and I think it's very unfair to people like you, Jose, and all those other parents who have went through the process the right way. And, unfortunately, the way the process is set up in the State of Connecticut, yes, you've been approved in 2018 for charter but, yet the dollars were not there to support you. I

understand that, because personally I've been through that process 20 years ago myself, when I wanted to get it. And I thought it was very unfair and I thought it was very political, also, at that time and that's the reason why I ran for office.

This Bill tries to fix that process so they're -- So they're being, when you are approved for charter, the resources are there for you to go ahead. So you do that, and other advocates do not have to come up here and plead with us -- and basically, not us, it's really the Appropriations Committee for the funds. So this is what this Bill tries to rectify when your state approves you, that means you are set and ready to go.

So, again, I thank you for your testimony. I don't want to belabor the point and that's for anyone else who comes up again, whether you're pro or anti -- We are trying to fix a process that has been in place and it's not a good process, and this is what this Bill does. So, I appreciate your testimony and we can move it on to the next person, thank you. Unless someone else has something to add to this -- this conversation.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I just wanted to make sure, Jose, what was the status of the building now -- of what you're trying to -- ?

JOSE PIMENTEL: So we have -- we have a location right off main street. We already had the renderings, we can send all of that over, and we are ready to basically move forward. We haven't completely purchased. or had to be able to purchase that because we don't know if we can open. But once that hurdle is cleared, we're able to purchase the land and build our school.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. And I -- we see another hand raised on -- Senator Miller. Thank you, Senator Miller, here -- there you are.

SEN. MILLER (27TH): I'm here. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Jose, I have a question for you. So you're -- you're saying that you have the funding to procure the building?

JOSE PIMENTEL: Yes, we have a \$25 million commitment and donation, we had a press conference on that. And we also have the location, you know, ready to go if we if we have the approval of that 1.2 million.

SEN. MILLER (27TH): Okay, so you need the 1.2 million to secure the building. you just want to make sure that the --

JOSE PIMENTEL: The 1.2 million, so that we could be a public school. We don't want to be one of those private money because then we're a private school, we literally don't need it. But legally, how can we be a public charter school if we are running with all private funds? At the end of the day is basically just so we can be, you know, part of the State charter school system.

SEN. MILLER (27TH): And thank you for that, I just want to make that clear as to why you need the 1.2 million so that individuals in case don't want to say, "Well, if you have 25 million, what's the problem?" Just open it, right? And so I just wanted to make that clear.

And Mr. Chair, if I may, thank you for that comment that you made earlier. I was very disappointed when we changed -- we implemented this hurdle for charter schools and the hurdle that the schools are experiencing now existed when Stanford's charter school of excellence opened a few years ago. Then they wouldn't be open, they will be closed and the State would be missing out on an excellent school, as we know that that Charter school ranked number one and two in testing.

And so, that's -- those are the Congress -- that's what we want from charter schools, it's not from schools period all about public schools. But if there's another way that we can accomplish and it's this children succeeding that we need to do that. So I appreciate this Bill does come forth because we can't -- I want to answer "Oh yes, you have the license and then tied there they, you know, provider's hands and getting the funding. So I appreciate this Bill, thank you very much, Jose and I wish you the best.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you and thank you for your testimony, Jose.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Curry who has another question.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Sorry about that. Thank you. Just again just to quickly clarify just so there's no confusion and it is -- it's fantastic to hear you have over \$25 million in contributions. That's -- not many people can say that. So that money -- Is the 1.2 million where would -- which would make you a part of the public school system here in Connecticut which would provide additional choice, which I think we all agree is fantastic or I would hope many agree it's fantastic.

That 25 million would help with -- you're guaranteeing us today that that money will allow you to build a building and secure all of the necessary permits and all that stuff going through the process with the City of Danbury and that there would be no need or ask for any additional funds beyond what you're aiming for today in order to open up that the school with the approved grades.

JOSE PIMENTEL: That is correct, if we get the money to be able to become a public entity. We have enough funds to be able to secure our own building without asking the State legislator for any more funds. The mayor -- everyone's on board with the

plan that we have and we can share that with you guys, in any other conversation that we can have.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I just want to clarify something as we go on and Jose, you don't have to answer, and first of all, is there any other questions from anybody on the Committee? Just for clarification, yes, you cannot operate -- You can't start unless you get that 1.2 million. However, if you're looking to grow your school out, you will have to receive more funding from the State of Connecticut. But that's all part of the process once you become a charter, so you will be needing more funding from the State of Connecticut but that's part of the process and we understand that so just because you have your \$25 million, that's not -- even those great is out there, you're still going to need the support from us.

JOSE PIMENTEL: So we understand that we are going to grow 110 --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): -- you know, I know how to stay, you know, I want the public to understand that. That's why. Thank you and thank you for your testimony.

Up next, we have Douglas Mills, followed by Karline Augustin, followed by Orlando Rodriguez. And again folks, we have 70 more people, my colleagues wants to testify, and we want to make sure we get them in so be mindful of your colleagues when you're presenting and asking questions. Thank you. Douglas?

DOUGLAS MILLS: Hello. Hi, my name is Douglas Mills. I'm here to testify support of SB No. 1034 AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER IN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Personally, I am an MSW student. And even though I'm not in the education field, I definitely see the importance of this Bill. Growing up in the school system, I grew up Hamden in the educational school system and I experienced my first minority teacher that wasn't -- a language teacher now up until high school.

And as a youth, I reckon or my mindset at that time was the teacher wasn't really for me, maybe because I didn't really see it. That could be a possibility or there could be other factors. But I also recognize now as a social worker, how kids think. There's a sense of power structure -- the first power structure we see outside of the home is in school, the classroom. The teacher is in charge of the classroom and as kids, we understand that there that that power structure is this and as a Black kid looking across and seeing other minority students and we see no one that looks like me in charge, maybe some sometimes you feeling like "Oh I can't get to that sense of power" or that sense of -- maybe that's the wrong word but that sense of authority to be in that position.

And I think, to have more teachers that look like a lot of students and that efforts and retain it is good for building morale and for the students in the classrooms and within communities such as Hamden, New Haven, or other schools, such as that.

And one of the main parts of the build that I do like is Section 3 is the plant for the outreach portion is, we have to go out to these local high schools. And to primp these students that education -- to be a teacher is important, that you can strive to be a teacher, to be influencing your Community to the next generation. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Douglas. Any questions for Douglas? Douglas, I'm glad you're social worker. I really wish you would have become an educator. And if you feel like crossing over,

there's opportunities for you and you're absolutely right, representation is so important, so important.

I was fortunate enough to have a Black male teacher in elementary school wasn't a gym teacher. So yeah, that's why we doing this legislation. Any other questions or comments for Douglas? Seeing none, we're going to move right ahead.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah. I wanted to see if we can go back to Mr. Fonseca because he is an active - - he's on active duty and he's helping --

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Right. I was going to say that can we go back to 33, Juan Fonseca. And then after Juan, we got to go to Karline, and then Orlando Rodriguez, followed by Diane Willcutts. Juan, you're up.

JUAN FONSECA TAPIA: Hello. Hello.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Juan Fonseca? There you are.

JUAN FONSECA TAPIA: Yeah, I'm here. Thank you for allowing me to come back. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel and Representative McCarty, thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I will not be reading my testimony I can email that to all of you, so you can review it later if you like. But I am here in to speak in support of Bill HB 6619, with clear language to make the inclusion of Native-American studies mandatory in our curriculum.

And as well as in support of SB 1034 and the minority teacher recruitment and in a position of HB 6616.

I want to talk to all of you about my experience as a student, as a community member and as an organizer. I migrated from Mexico at the age of 18.

I graduated from Danbury High School. In regards to making sure that we add Native American studies into our curriculum and thinking about what my Senator Julie Kushner said about the Connecticut Legislature and the commitment that you all made to make sure that the policy that you will create is through a racial equity lens. And I think that it's extremely important for us to -- if we want to find and creative racial justice and create equity, we need to address the eraser that Native American students experience in the classroom and as well as LGBTQI students. I experienced that erasure in the classroom and I think that unless we acknowledge that and address that we will never find real equity.

I also want to talk about again, my opposition to opening or changing the law to allow charter schools to open in communities. I think that there has been a lot of miscommunication and I've seen that miscommunication in my community. And I think that it's extremely important for all of the legislators to actually listen to community members and see both sides of the story. In Mexico myself, I saw how education was pushed to be privatized and how educational models like charter schools created and made the education system closer to open to the for-profit market.

And I think we all need to accept and acknowledge the fact that our education system in the country, we are facing a crisis and in this state, and I think that failing to recognize that will not allow us to address the real problem that we all have and that we're all facing. And thinking charter schools is the solution, even though we are seeing it as an option, I think that it's a mistake and I think that that shows that we don't want to acknowledge the fact that there is a problem with our education system that we all need to address. Those legislators, community members, educators and again, allowing the charter school to be open in Danbury is

putting a band-aid on a bleeding wound that has been bleeding for a very long time.

As I said, I graduated from Danbury High School. I experienced some of the problems that many of the students are facing like overcrowding, lack of resources, but fortunately, I was able to thrive and persist. I graduated with high honors, I received 13 scholarships, but it's because there were certain resources that like, as I said, we need more of those resources in our public's education. But I think that I am the proof of that -- the fact that our system is working, however, we need to make sure that we address the issue of funding and our legislators are --

LUZ OSUBA: Your time is up.

JUAN FONSECA TAPIA: Yeah, I will summarize. So again, I would like all of you to make sure that the HB 66 -- 6619 will pass, with clear language to make Native American studies mandatory and I strongly oppose HB 6616.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, we'll move ahead. We have up next, Douglas -- no I'm sorry, not Douglas Mills. Karline Augustin.

KARLINE AUGUSTIN: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, good afternoon everyone. Good afternoon, Senators, Representatives, Members of the Committee, and everybody else that is on this meeting today.

I am attending this meeting today to support funding for SB 1034, this is the ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHERS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. I am going to summarize my testimony to the four key points this Bill will do for me, as a minority teacher, parent, and student.

This Bill, if you pass it or fund it, it will allow me to attend the teacher's residency program that is being offered by CREC and Marlene Megos is the Director of that Program.

As a parent, as a minority -- I am a graduate student, I have my Masters in Computer Science. I'm a technologist. I have been in the field for 30-something years. I worked from IBM, all the way down and up. I have been trying to become a certified teacher for a little over 10 years now. In vain. And this program that Marlene is -- mentioned to me, is a great program, not only for me to become a certified teacher, but for me to represent in the classroom. I can -- I can be a technology teacher, I can be a teacher from first grade to sixth grade. I can be a college teacher as a matter of fact, but I chose to teach elementary school because this is where we need to start with education.

The second part of my meeting today, my calling, is education inequality. They are talking about computer science. They're talking about language. They're talking about teaching kids or having the teachers available to do that. I speak Creole. I speak French.

DALLAS EMERLE: [crosstalk] -- minute mark. If you wouldn't mind summarizing. Thank you so much.

KARLINE AUGUSTIN: Okay, um, well -- Senators, everybody, the only thing I'm asking you to do for me please, if you don't do anything else for anybody else, I'm being selfish, please fund this 1034, SB 1034 needs your help, thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, thank you, Karline, and this is the reason why we have -- a program like this was put together. For the fact that we have so many people coming from industry that want to go in the classroom and we've made it so difficult and it shouldn't be that way. So that's my commentary.

Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, we'll move right along. Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Fiorello has her hand up.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): I just wanted to make a quick comment, Mr. Chairman. I think, Ms. Augustin, you would make an amazing teacher. Yes, you'd be a wonderful teacher.

KARLINE AUGUSTIN: So thank you, thank you. Let's pass this Bill.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Miss Augustine. Up next, Orlando Rodriguez, followed by Diane Willcutts, followed by Katharine Morris.

ORLANDO RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez and I serve as a research and policy development specialist of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents tens of thousands of active retired educators from all areas of Connecticut. Today, I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 6616.

CEA opposes this proposal to take the General Assembly out of the decision-making process for funding new Charter schools. Over the last 10 years, funding for charter schools has more than doubled to over \$120 million a year. In the process, it caused an unnecessary expansion of a parallel public funding system for K-12 education.

Furthermore, unlike locally-elected boards of education, charters are overseen by unelected and unaccountable boards of governors. Some charters needlessly pay a fee to a charter management organization for a vague management consulting services. For the tax year ending June 2017,

Achievement First received more than \$17 million in management fees and Achievement First Incorporated is the parent of Achievement First Bridgeport, Achievement First Hartford, Amistad and Elm City Preparatory.

This Bill would shift democratic oversight of tax dollars spent on charter schools from the General Assembly to an unelected State Board of Education, which would then distribute the funding to our Charter school that has an unelected Board of Governors. If it were enacted, HB 6616 would roll back charter accountability measures enacted in public Act 15-231 to make charter funding processes more responsible is by ensuring legislative oversights. Let's not forget that charter schools used to increase their enrollments and after the fact, go to the State and ask for more money [crosstalk] having already made promises to parents and students.

CEA believes that students in existing charter schools deserve fair funding. To this add-in, we advocate increases that lifts all boats, including traditional neighborhood and magnet schools. We reject the premise that market mechanism that should be used to redirect funds from one school to another as a student's work widgets.

As the Committee considers addressing the needs of students and charter schools, we suggest that you focus instead on the practices of charter management organizations that take millions of dollars of Connecticut's charter school funds from classrooms and send them to the boardrooms of charter management organizations. We urge rejection of this Bill.

In addition when I testified a couple of weeks ago I --

DALLAS EMERLE: Your two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

ORLANDO RODRIGUEZ: I would just like to say, in our testimony, we also have response to a request from two weeks ago for clarification on our recommendations to make a charter schools more transparent and more accountable. That's part of -- that's included in our testimony. And I do have one more question. I want to follow what Jose said, for me, that said he suggested that donations to charter schools be used to offset funding from the State, so is he saying that for every dollar donation that a charter school receives, that the charter school should repay the State a dollar for what he has given to that charter school. You know, I've been curious, is that what he's saying? And I'm done.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, thank you, Orlando, for your testimony.

Up next, we have Diane Willcutts, followed by Kathy. Kathy Morris, followed by Nyree Hodges.

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Hi, my name is Diane Willcutts and I'm here to testify on the Right to Read Bill, 6620. On behalf of Special Education Equity for Kids, we work on behalf of the more than 80,000 Connecticut students with disabilities. I'm also a Special Education advocate who has worked in districts all over the states. I attend hundreds of school meetings a year and I've seen firsthand the challenges districts have faced in terms of teaching kids to read.

SEEK agrees 100% that literacy needs to be a priority and that we need to make radical changes. We're getting over a billion dollars in education funding through the American Rescue Plan, let's teach kids to read. I mean, bottom line, there's nothing more important that we can do in our schools. Research shows that 95% of students are capable of reading on grade level, and yet,

Connecticut it's only 40% of fourth graders that are reading on grade level.

As far as the Bill, we need more safeguards written into it, to ensure it's successful. One concern is that the Bill repeatedly emphasizes that the goal is to have students reading proficiently by the end of fifth grade. The research tells us it's got to be by the end of third grade and so saying it's by the end of fifth grade, is actually potentially very dangerous and is communicating to districts that there's more time than there really is.

Another concern is that a lot of this Bill is dedicated to Alliance Districts and I will say that there are huge opportunity gaps, even in non-alliance districts. And we need to, you know, if we're going to invest in literacy, we need to not leave out any students.

SEEK is concerned that a lot of the lot of the Bill focuses on reading programs and not enough focus is on teacher training. Teachers need to be trained in structured literacy. You can have a great program but if the teacher doesn't know how to implement it, it's not helpful. There are actually a lot of districts using, quote unquote, good programs, but the teachers have never been trained in the science of reading or they've had a one-week training, where they have monthly training and they just don't really know how to implement.

It can take two years. I mean Haskins Laboratory said it took two years to train teachers in the science of reading to the point where they were effective and it required a lot of mentorship. So there's a lot of supervised practicum with that, too. It's a big investment, but we have to use the money up in two years, so let's invest there.

The Bill also needs to make sure that districts do not run afoul of the individuals who --

DALLAS EMERLE: Diane, [crosstalk] your two and a half minutes. If you wouldn't mind --

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Yeah. We want to make sure that there's still the ability for plenty and placement team meetings to individualize reading instruction for students with disabilities. You know, we don't want to violate that particular law. We were happy to see that the Bill established a Reading Leadership Implementation Council, but we were appalled that there are no -- there's no apparent representation on it. There's no apparent representation related to children with disabilities and that absolutely needs to change. I mean, reading it impacts all children, but the children with disabilities are the canary in the coal mine and we see the difficulties very clearly, in terms of what's going on.

So I thank you very much for your time and I'm available for any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay, thank you and thank you for your testimony and your advocacy for children who need to learn how to read, and I agree wholeheartedly. Not only that we need it both ways, right, we need I teach you to be trained and property of professional developed in the methods of teaching kids how to read. But we also need it in the pre-service before these teachers come into our classrooms and I think that's a big focus also, but we still got a service-up and find a profession for the ones who are already there because they're not going anywhere.

Any questions from the Committee? Thank you again, Diane.

DIANE WILLCUTTS: Thank you.

SEN. DOUGLAS MCCRORY: Katharine Morris, followed by Nyree Hodges. Followed by as Oswaldo Chin.

Catherine. No Catherine? Going once. Okay. Nyree Hodges. Nyree Hodges.

NYREE HODGES: Okay, yep, I'm here. Hi, how's it going?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Going well.

NYREE HODGES: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and other Members of the Education Committee. I'm speaking today on behalf of-- I'm a Hartford resident, but my job as a project coordinator with the Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative. And I would like to ask for your support of Bill 6621, specifically Section 3, to establish a Connecticut-Grown Connecticut Kids Grant Program.

So, I love working with kids, my background, I've worked as a food and garden educator in two elementary schools in Bridgeport, two high schools in Bridgeport, one charter school in New Haven, and an Environmental Education Center in Wolcott, Connecticut, and now I have seen firsthand the importance of Farm to School programming. And I'll just say that, from working with students from so many different backgrounds, all kids and teachers alike really do benefit from Farm to School programming.

This grants program will support district schools, childcare centers, and organizations in establishing or growing their Farm to School efforts, including access to more local foods and school nutrition programs, educational opportunities, through STEM, outdoor growing experiences, to support the health and well-being of our students.

And I've seen that most students who struggle in the classroom really do shine in outdoor education. And there's a need and demand for this type of program. Students right now are compacted by trauma and stress and isolation because of COVID-19, and the

uncertainty of the future, so access to safe, outdoor educational opportunities for students are paramount right now. And also 92 towns or districts have signed up to participate in Farm to School programming in the 2019-2020 school year, and they continue to participate in the 2021 year.

And this represents a total of 585 cafeterias across Connecticut that are promoting Farm to School. And lastly, as Dawn Crayco before me, who also testified on, again, on this Bill-- sorry, in support of this Bill, Connecticut lags behind other states that have established Farm to School funded programming, including our neighboring states of New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine. So, thanks so much for your consideration and for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony. Any questions for Nyree? Seeing none, again, Nyree, thank you for your testimony. Up next, Oswaldo Chin. I think that's Mr. Chin right there in the car.

OSWALDO CHIN: Yes, yes. I'm on my way to work, I pulled over, so I'm here at the Community Park and right, so I can give my testimony. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarty, and everyone in this meeting. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Oswaldo Chin and I'm from Danbury. I'm here to speak in opposition to Bill HB 6616. We don't want to a charter school in our city. If this Bill was the law, there will be no way for me to address the General Assembly about a charter school coming to Danbury like a Prospect charter school. I am a proud supporter of Danbury public schools. Despite our challenges we face, my experience and my children's experience has been nothing but the best.

As an immigrant myself, I understand the value of access to a quality public school education for

every student. I want our efforts to go towards supporting Danbury public schools in all our students, and I do not want to a charter school coming to Danbury. I do not want to a school in my city that is only available for some of the students, and I do not want to a school in my city that does not answer to local elected officials. What I do want to is that, Danbury public schools to be fully funded.

The selling point of charter schools is that they need a choice, we need a choice other than public schools. Well, we have a choices, we have many schools. I believe in choice, but once you leave the public education, you pay for yourself, period. And I also would like to voice my support for SB 1034. And thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak, and let me conclude by saying this, with all due respect to everybody out there, thank you for your service, and thank you that you guys listening to us.

But as elected officials, you guys are supposed to safeguard entities that we trust you guys. And by allowing this, by allowing HB 6616, you guys are giving up the supervisorial job that you guys were entrusted, because charter schools are not-- and they don't want to oversight of our school board and our voices. Thank you, and thank you for your time, and thank you for your service to all of you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Oswaldo. Any questions for Oswaldo? Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Oswaldo. I wanted to ask you, are you also opposed to the other public school choices, like open choice, vocational agriculture, and inter-district magnet?

OSWALDO CHIN: No, I'm not opposed to those, no. As long as it's public, I'm not opposed. I'm opposed to charter schools specifically.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): They're also public, though.

OSWALDO CHIN: Well, in this case, a charter school is public but at the end of the day, it is not over-- we don't have the oversight of the school as we do have it on the public sector and, therefore, I don't support.

Because an administrative officer can make so much money, but they can pay-- stagnate wages to teachers, and the turnover of charter school is very much so, up to 40-50%. And charter schools are so anti-democratic, as you guys know, Mr. Reed, the charter school founder, he said he could not wait to have a school boards that are not elected, so he can keep supporting charter schools. Therefore, I'm totally against that.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Okay. Thank you, then.

OSWALDO CHIN: Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Anyone else on the Committee? Seeing none, we'll move ahead. Jonathan Budd, followed by Michael Coyne, and Caty Poole.

JONATHAN BUDD: Thank you, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee. As Superintendent of the Woodbridge School District, I begin by stressing that the right to read is a fundamental right. Success in life depends, to a large degree, on an individual's development of early literacy skills, habits, and tendencies.

Indeed, helping each and every one of Connecticut's children learn how to read is among our chief obligations. Exactly because of the importance of helping all of our children learn how to read, I must speak in opposition to proposed House Bill

6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN EQUITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS. The intent of proposed Bill 6620 is laudable, our state scores very significantly in their preparation of students in fundamental skills, such as reading.

The equity issues in Connecticut are real, and by several measures are growing. As a state, we can and should do better, but despite its best intent, proposed Bill 6620 promotes that all districts need the same degree of monitoring by auditing from and compliance with a new center for Literacy Research and Reading Success.

With such wide-ranging responsibilities as, "Implementing a coordinated, statewide reading plan, approving at least five reading curriculum models or programs to be implemented by local boards of education, and providing independent random reviews of a local board of education." Keep in mind that many of Connecticut school districts have attained and continue to attain outstanding student reading achievement without such oversight. Indeed, with strong local leadership and existing collaborative efforts, many of our districts have developed curricula that work well in the context of their communities.

Curriculum development and professional development are not best achieved through state-developed, state-prescribed methods. One might observe that proposed Bill 6620 allows for a range, at least five of reading curriculum to be implemented in Connecticut, and that it even allows local districts to request a waiver, under certain guidelines, but these caveats miss the point that mandating compliance, even with some flexibility by every district in Connecticut, diverts resources from the districts who really need the assistance of state-level leaders. Significant revisions to proposed Bill 6620 are an order, including much more targeted focus on districts whose student performance in

reading demonstrates a need for state intervention, and much greater involvement in leading the proposed center, from local superintendents, principals, and literacy leaders.

Thank you very much for your efforts to help all children learn to read, but please do not channel the best aspects of those efforts into additional bureaucratic compliance for all school districts when a much narrower approach would be far more productive. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions from the Committee? I'll just say, Superintendent Budd, I'm glad your students are doing very well. Thank you, and thank you for your testimony.

JONATHAN BUDD: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next up we have, Michael-- is it--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Coyne.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No, Michael Coney, yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And Caty--

PROF. MICHAEL COYNE: Yes, hi, good afternoon. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members, Berthel and McCarty, and Distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is Michael Coyne, and I'm a professor of Special Education and head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the NIAC School of Education at the University of Connecticut.

And I'm here to speak strongly in favor of HB 6620, the Right to Read ACT. My research focuses on reading development and effective reading instruction and I've had the great privilege of being part of Connecticut's K3 Literacy Initiative, or CK3LI, since its inception. For me partnering

with teachers and administrators and districts across Connecticut to support student reading growth has been one of the most important and meaningful experiences in my professional career and I'm excited about the possibility this Bill is significantly expanding the reach of this important and timely work across Connecticut.

I'd like to use my time today to talk about the research evidence supporting Connecticut's reading model, which is, I think, is at the heart of this Bill. Connecticut's reading model was developed to build on the decades of scientific research on reading and includes a comprehensive framework of effective evidence-based practices and things like reading assessment, instruction, intervention, leadership, professional development, and family engagement, practices that are all informed by the science of reading.

However, as part of this initiative, we went a step further and conducted additional, carefully controlled research studies on the effectiveness of Connecticut's reading model in schools and districts here in Connecticut. So the research is clear, Connecticut's reading model works. Research Data consistently show that students experience greater growth in early literacy skills across grade levels, and across literacy measures when their school implements Connecticut's reading model, and these benefits continue to increase over time.

So the research supporting Connecticut's reading model meets rigorous ESSA evidence standards, and moreover, this research was conducted right here in Connecticut with districts that are representative of the range schools across Connecticut, and also representative of the diverse student populations in our state. I'd like to say it's extremely rare for a state to have such robust and rigorous research evidence on the effectiveness of the State Initiative, and in fact, other states across the country have looked to our research evidence, and

some the Connecticut reading model, to inform the development of their own statewide reading improvement efforts.

I think we owe it to schools and teachers to provide them with tools and strategies that work. Tools and strategies supported by the best research evidence and that result in meaningful reading growth for all students.

I also believe that state investments in education should be informed by research, not just because there's something special about research on its own, but because investments that are guided by research are--

CLERK: Sorry for interrupting, you're at two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

PROF. MICHAEL COYNE: Yeah, thank you. Smarter investments that are more likely to result and improve student outcomes, because we're betting on practices that we already know work. The Right to Read ACT is an investment in what we know works, for improving literacy in Connecticut. And I think the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success will ensure that even more teacher schools and districts across Connecticut will have the supports they need to implement what works for achieving meaningful reading improvement for all students. So thanks so much for your time today and I'm happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Michael. Any questions from the Committee? And thank you for your work in helping teachers teach reading, you've been great asset.

PROF. MICHAEL COYNE: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move right ahead. Caty Poole, followed by--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Dr. Sana Shaikh.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Sana, yeah.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Shaikh.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Caty.

CATY POOLE: Yes, thank you. I'm the executive director of a nonprofit, organic vegetable farm in Woodbridge and I believe you also have written testimony from our farm manager, Steve Munom. Our farm has, in addition to growing diverse vegetables, we've also been offering educational programs to schools, camps, and other groups since 2012, and I can tell you that the interest in demand only continues to grow.

In addition to selling our produce, our farm also donates thousands of pounds of fresh vegetables to hunger relief. These primarily go to families in Ansonia and Derby. Additionally, we host approximately 1500 students each year in hands-on education at our working vegetable farm, most of these visiting students come from schools that lack the funds to bust students to farms like ours, meaning we are providing most of these educational services at no charge to schools. This hands-on education is a valuable tool in teaching elements of STEM. And sorry I did not say this, but I am speaking in support of Bill 6621, specifically, Section 3, today.

We're located less than a mile of Ansonia's two elementary schools, and additionally, there are six-- a total of six schools within a 2.5-mile radius of our farm. Our farm also worked with Dawn Crayco in hosting an AmeriCorps foodservice member for five years, working with many of these schools in the

surrounding towns. However, a majority of families and children have lost the simple knowledge that their food actually comes from the ground. We've seen recent state legislative changes that have allowed more schools to purchase products, both dairy fruits and vegetables from locally grown farms, however, more can be done, and this Bill would definitely support those efforts. Our complex food procurement process for schools includes many items that come from hundreds or thousands of miles away without regard for natural resources or the seasons. As we become accustomed to buying produce we want, anything we want any time of year, these actions often compromise the nutritional quality of food, resulting in poor health among community members and extreme negative impacts on climate health.

By encouraging the connection between students and the many small farms across our state, we create healthy habits at a young age that can have a direct impact on community members' health, we connect students and their families to working farms and producers, right in their own community. I've been lucky enough to see firsthand how a student's face lights up when they taste a radish and actually like it, when they pull carrots or garlic out of the ground and when they hold a chicken and understand where the parts they eat come from. This Bill and these actions can promote

CLERK: Sorry for interrupting, you're at two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

CATY POOLE: Preservation of open space, the improved quality of soil and water, and it creates jobs. Over the last nine years our farm has increased from one year-round full-time employee and for seasonal staff to four-year round employees and as many as 20 seasonal staff, including a summer youth employment program. Thanks for hearing me today.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Welander.

REP. WELANDER (114TH): Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to thank Ms. Poole and Mr. Michael for their advocacy on this action. Massaro farms are fantastic and we-- my daughter and I actually visited recently and learned how to tap maple trees during a lesson. And so, this type of outreach and understanding of where your food comes from is, I think, incredibly important for all of our students. So, thank you again for taking the time to be here today.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions? Any other questions from Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, no other hands are up. So, I guess, we move next to, Dr. Sana-- I don't know whether I'm saying this correct, but Shaikh.

DR. SANA SHAIKH: Dear Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sana Shaikh, and I am a parent, educator, and resident of Connecticut in support of SB 1034. I never had a teacher that looked like me throughout my entire K-12 experience.

I grew up in the, predominantly, white suburbs of California and it was not until college that I had one professor who shared my ethnic and cultural background. As a mother, I do not want that reality for my children. It is an incredibly powerful experience to see people in power that look like you and reflect your values and background. I wish that I had teachers that I could relate to growing up,

and grappling what it means to be a person of color in this world.

I worked in education my entire life and I'm so heartened by the progress that we're making when it comes to talking about race, bias, and the power that educators have when it comes to shaping the lives of their students, but we have so much more work to do.

Even now, though I possess a Ph.D. and have committed my life to education, I notice micro aggressions against me. It is crucial that educators are aware of their biases, so that they reflect and change their behavior with students in the classroom. It is truly a matter of life and death.

This legislation directly impacts my life and the life of my children. Connecticut for us is home, and Amon, Amin, my twins will be attending their K-12 experience here. I don't want them to experience the challenges of what it means to be a person of color in predominantly white educational institutions. I want their teachers to be aware of their bias and actively dismantle any negative misconceptions they have about others, based on who they are, where they come from, or how their name is pronounced. Moreover, I want the educator force in Connecticut to represent the people that live here. We have to acknowledge that Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country and has one of the highest opportunity gaps in the country as well. By approving this legislation, we are going to be taking steps at mitigating some of the harsh realities that our children face in this state.

This legislation makes me hopeful. It by no means solves many of the larger inequities that we face in schools, but it does show that Connecticut wants to create more of a racially and culturally diverse educated workforce. It also shows our willingness

to learn from our history and be innovative in times of challenge. Now, more than ever, we need to lean into difficult conversations and this legislation paves the way for that reality. Thank you so much for all of your hard work, the time here today. I'm privileged to speak and happy to answer any questions I have. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, doctor. Thank you so much for your support for minority teacher recruitment Bill? I don't see any hands up, no. Well, thank you, again, thank you for your testimony.

DR. SANA SHAIKH: Thank you so much for all of your hard work, I appreciate it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. We have, Linda Joseph.

LINDA JOSEPH: Yes, that's correct. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez. My name is Linda Joseph, and I'm supporting Bill-- Senate Bill 1034. Studies have shown that students learn more by teachers that look like them. The reason that I say this is because according to the K through 12 disparity factor statistics, it's stated at college degrees are regarded as a primary vehicle for reducing poverty and closing the wealth gap between people of color and Whites, yet the disparities that exist are alarming.

Research has shown evidence of systematic bias and teacher expectation for African American students and non-Black teachers were found to have lower expectation of Black students than Black teachers. And that came from, "Who Believes In Me," the effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations, and also the Nation's Report Card 2015, NAEP, mathematics and reading assessments, title 14510.

I have the privilege of having worked as a substitute teacher for the past six years. During that time, every school district classroom that I've taught in, the students always ask me, "Why can't you be a teacher?" And I would always have to say, "Because unfortunately, I'm not certified." Through Bill, Senate Bill 1034, it will enable programs like this more of an opportunity to realize our dream of becoming a certified teacher, and I've dreamed of having a role model. I know for a fact that if we have programs like Connecticut Teacher Residency Programs, it will help everyone to win, the students win and the staff will win. So, therefore, I'm supporting for funding the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program, because in my opinion, there's a greater need for more minority teachers, especially in Inner-city schools. Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. Joseph. I don't see any questions at the moment, but thank you so much for your testimony.

LINDA JOSEPH: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have, Timothy, is Timothy Craine.

LINDA JOSEPH: But can I say one more thing before we move on, please?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Sure, you can say--

LINDA JOSEPH: Okay. I know that we don't have any questions for me, but what I'm going to say is, I have been out there teaching for the last six years and what I've seen out there, as far as our African-American students, and how they're treated has been unbelievable. And the fact that the teachers that are teaching them--I'm not saying they're not good, they do not know how to relate to our students.

Because one class that I was in when I was Inner city, the kids were saying to me, they would not

listen, and I know how to make them listen, but they said, "Ms. Joseph just get the blow horn, that's what I teach to uses." I said, "What do you mean blow horn?" I said, "You're human beings and why would I need to blow horn? You are going to listen because you're human beings, and you need to learn a lesson, and education is your key. "And they did all my work and they sit down and they listen. And that's the difference. That's what I want to say today. Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Miss Joseph. I don't see Timothy Craine up here so I'm going to go next to, Matthew Conway. Hi, Mr. Conway. You're on mute. There you go.

MATTHEW CONWAY: How are you, Representative?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): How are you?

MATTHEW CONWAY: Fantastic, thanks.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You could begin.

MATTHEW CONWAY: Good afternoon, Co-Chairs, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Ranking Members, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and dedicated, passionate Members of this Education Committee. It's nice to be before you once again. My name is Matt Conway and I'm here today, as Superintendent of Derby public schools and Co-Chair of the CAPSS Legislative Committee to testify on HB 6618, 1034, and 6620.

First up, with regard to 6618, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FUNDING ISSUES AFFECTING BOARDS OF EDUCATION, CAPSS supports Section 3 of this Bill, to allow regional boards of education to increase from 1% to 2% into the aggregate amount of annual and supplemental appropriations for their reserve fund for capital and non-reoccurring expenditures for the annual district budget. This is very similar to the

language we passed two sessions ago under PUBLIC ACT, 117 for all non-regional boards of education.

This language was in a different Bill than that adjusted. Next one, HB 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

First, I just want to thank Greg, Dr. Nicole, from Ellington, and this Committee for bringing this issue forward. And CAPSS supports this with everything and believes in what we need in front of our kids every single day. And our only exception to it is the funding source that's outlined in Section 2C2 of the Bill, which takes 10% of any increase in such funds that the Alliance districts receive over the amount that it received from the fiscal year ending prior, and it's taking it away from our most disadvantaged kids.

We would instead like to sit down, with the legislature, and work on a funding plan, similar to what we've done with Section 10 of the blueprint to transform Connecticut schools, which will provide a long-term, sustainable approach to supporting this incredible recruitment and retention for minority teachers. We just believe the funding for this recruitment and training are taking away funds from our most needy districts is a better way to do that. And then HB 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAPS, AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, While I support the intentions of HB 6620, and you've heard a lot of testimony on this already today, to provide the model curriculum and assessment support to districts--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Matthew, you are at two and a half minutes if you don't mind summarizing.

MATTHEW CONWAY: You've got it. I'd like to just suggest that some changes to the language to accomplish the intent of the Bill, without mandating districts use the prescribed model curriculum and assessments, and placing the oversight of this

program under the State Department of Education or RESC, we think will be a more sustainable approach, still using the research that you're supporting in this particular Bill, but just providing a different oversight and removing the mandate for districts. And I'm happy to answer any questions, and thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Matt. Just wanted to-- just quick comment, in regards to the funds, with the additional dollars that we're getting for the next two years from the federal government, there might be some room there to negotiate that, so I just wanted to give you a heads up on that. Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (114TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and welcome, Matt, to the Committee today. And I appreciate your comments with respect to 1034. There is a piece near the end that talks about video training for hiring--for the educators in the hiring process, and I'm just wondering if you could comment, do you think that's sufficient? The video training online or would you have any other recommendations? Because I think as we've gone through this, and we've been inquisitive on the Education Committee as to why we can't-- why we don't have more hiring of our teachers of color. And so, this is an issue that we've been looking at for quite a while. So if you could comment.

MATTHEW CONWAY: Sure, I appreciate the opportunity to. I think it's a start. I understand from the language in the Bill, circle will be creating that video. I do think it's a start, if-- would be able to administer to all staff in district, as opposed to just those outlined in Section 5. I think if there's additional training available for administrators that would be responsible for hiring, that will be very helpful for those people, beyond just the video, to really understand the need.

REP. MCCARTY (114TH): Thank you, Matt, and thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good afternoon, my former classmate, how are you?

MATTHEW CONWAY: Fantastic. And it's great to see you.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Great to see you as well, Matt. Matt, you didn't finish your thoughts on 6620, would you mind finishing your thoughts on that, please?

MATTHEW CONWAY: Sure.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Or did you finish?

MATTHEW CONWAY: We are an Alliance district issue, as you may know. We have participated with the current reading models under the State Department of Ed. Many supporters of this Bill, Literacy How, HILL for literacy have been in our district for the entire time I-- for the past eight years, that we've been an Alliance district. And so, we understand that what they bring to the table.

I just want to be careful we don't mandate certain programs for all districts and the same assessment for all districts in this process, but also that it's not-- it doesn't come out from under the State Department of Ed. I do think they've done a great job in promoting the resources, providing support for the resources, making training available, and working with us to contract with HILL for Literacy and Literacy How for both the delivery and the support. So I wouldn't want to lose that momentum and take it out from under the State Department of Ed, and or have it operate independently as the Bill, at least, suggest in the way I interpreted it,

under a separate Literacy Center for reading success, which would report to a council.

So, I just think the State Department of Ed and or RESC would be a better place to maybe house the program moving forward.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): All right, thank you for that. And I appreciate your input, and the-- I don't know if you heard the Commissioner earlier, that they are committed to housing this program, they will prefer to have the program under them as well. And that has been a challenge, in trying to-- SD, they've been a great partner, but they're limited to-- as to the number of staff they-- the amount of staff that they have, right? So just making this work, and you know that they-- Commissioner can waive a district as long as they meet certain criteria. So, there are some mandates, but there are also waivers available.

MATTHEW CONWAY: I do understand that, I've heard testimony on that today as well. I just wonder, do we need to make it mandatory with a waiver or can we give districts the flexibility of making that decision and without having to do the waiver? Just a thought. To Representative Sanchez's point before, on the funding that is coming down the pipe for all of us, maybe there's a possibility within what the State Department of Ed will be receiving to keep it housed there and bolster it, improve on it, expand it, and it in bolster it with that-- with some of that funding.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): All right. Well, thank you again, for your testimony. It's great seeing you again. Take care.

MATTHEW CONWAY: Thank you, Senator, great to see you as well.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Matt. I don't have any more questions or hands up, so thank you for your testimony today.

MATTHEW CONWAY: Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next, I'm going to go back to Senator Hwang, who is back with us. Many of our elected officials have been back and forth in different meetings and public hearings. Senator Hwang, are you there?

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): I am.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): I am.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): How are you?

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): I'm great. Good afternoon, everyone, and today, in honor of St. Patrick's Day, and in all of our Irish-Americans who have contributed to our country and state, I am state Senator, Tony Hwang, representing the 28th District encompassing Westport, Weston, Fairfield, Eastern, New town, and Sandy Hook.

Greetings to Chairperson, Representative Sanchez, and Senator McCrory, as well as Ranking Members, Senator Berthel and Representative McCarty, and all of the hard-working Members of the Education Committee. And a very special welcome to my friend, Senator Patricia Miller, on your Committee, welcome, Senator Miller, It's great to have you and I must admit that I find myself watching and learning from this Committee far too late into the evening. I want to say quickly, I want to personally ask for your support of House Bill 6617, AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE-GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND REVISIONS OF SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECT STATUTES. I want to acknowledge the support

of Senator Haskell, Representative Steinberg, and Thomas, all of whom share the representation of Westport with me.

Every school in this Bill deserves our support. I'm proud as a state Senator of Westport to enthusiastically ask for your support about the Coleytown Middle School.

It's on line T53 and T55. This school has students from grade six through eighth grade, and is in need of renovation and redesign caused by mold, air health quality concerns, and an architectural design problem that will impact students, teachers, and staffs' well-being. School construction is one of the most important Bills that has no partisan tone and it is all about the well-being and safety of educating our children, and ensuring the highest safety and health standards for every child in every community is a priority in our state.

So I'm going to be brief and be ready to answer any questions from the Committee Members. But I appreciate the Committee in raising this Bill and having these schools-- on these Bills under consideration. So thank you, Chairman Sanchez, for having me and allowing me to be late as I've been in other meetings, but it really is great to appear before your Committee. I'm happy to take any questions about the project related to Coleytown Middle School and anything related to this Bill. Thank you, Mr.-- Representative Sanchez.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Senator. And I don't have any questions, but I just have a comment. Absolutely, this is a Bill that is the most bipartisan Bill that comes out of-- here at the Capital, as you know, because everyone has a stake in it. And it is so important that we also provide a safe and healthy learning environment for all our children throughout the state of Connecticut. And so, when a building is not healthy, we need to

repair it or, of course, get rid of it and put up a new one if we have to.

That is so important for our children, so I just wanted to make that comment. And I don't see any hands up, Senator, so thank you, again, for your support of the Bill and you for your testimony.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Absolutely, Chairman Sanchez. And as I've been watching, as I said, many of your Education Committees, I have learned to do my best to be brief and to the point. So thank you very much for the opportunity, and I want to thank all of your Members for the great work that you do. Have a great day and Happy St. Patrick's Day, again.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, likewise. Next we have, Stephanie Deason.

STEPHANIE DEASON: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. I'm honored to be able to speak today in support of House Bill 6621, specifically, Section 3, funding for CT-Grown to CT kids grants. My name is Stephanie Deason, formerly a lifelong resident of Willimantic, very new resident to the town of Montville.

I'm a registered dietitian and the foodservice Director for Mansfield public schools. I believe using local foods in the Mansfield public schools foodservice program is important because it allows our students access to food they may not otherwise have the opportunity to try at home. It also connects the school system to the local farming community. Parents are delighted to hear when their child has been able to access local foods through meals at school, and more recently, meals at home as well. When school menus feature local foods, the local farming community is also highlighted to a new audience that might not otherwise be aware of available local products.

Ever since starting in my position as a school food service director, I found that pursuing a robust Farm to School program requires good communication and having an understanding of the farmers' work.

This is key when building relationships for successful purchasing. Implementing a Farm to School program takes a lot of time and support from your staff in the cafeteria, the schools, the administration, your superintendent, your business officials. Once an established Farm to School program is running well, the opportunity to grow it gets easier and easier. Small grants can be a catalyst for change. Our own program took off after we were able to purchase a few pieces of equipment that helped us process local food in the summer so we could use it throughout the school year. Without this, we'd only be limited to serving local foods while they're in season, which doesn't always align with the school year here in Connecticut.

Having a freezer stock of prepared local vegetables allows my cafeteria staff to easily incorporate these ingredients into meals without adding more prep to their busy day. A Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program could help me do more with my, "Eat local," at Mansfield Public Schools Program, it could fuel many other programs like mine, and it could help build a larger community practice of school foodservice directors that are not only innovating in the cafeteria, but doing it while supporting local farm businesses. This testimony only touches on how Farm to School programs impact school foodservice programs and farmers. Farm to School work goes beyond the kitchen and cafeteria, into classrooms in almost any subject area, including equity, indoors or outdoors, and gardening and beyond out into this community a true win-win for any district. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak today.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. Deason. Of course, farming is so important and for our kids to

get this statewide. And what this Bill does, it's absolutely something we need. Hopefully, we can find the funding for it. I don't see any hands up, so thank you, again, for your testimony.

STEPHANIE DEASON: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I have next, Ian Neviaseiri, I hope I said that right, and Joseph Listro is right after him.

IAN NEVIASERI: Okay, good afternoon. My name is Ian Neviaseiri, and I'm the Superintendent of the Region 18 School District, which covers the town of Lyme and Old-Lyme. I'm here today testifying in support of House Bill 6618.

As you heard earlier today, passage of this Bill will correct an inequity that came out of the 2019 legislative session. It was noted earlier, from somebody's testimony, that this issue was also raised in last year's session but due to the pandemic never made it into law. In 2019, as part of PUBLIC ACT 117, specifically Section 285, municipalities were given the ability to increase their contributions to a non-lapsing account for educational purposes, from 1% to 2% of the total budgeted appropriation for education for the prior fiscal year.

Unfortunately, regional school districts were not included in this change as our ability to contribute to a reserve fund for capital and non-recurring expenditures is covered under a completely different statute. We're actually covered under Connecticut General Statute 10-51. And since that statute was never changed, regional school districts are still limited to a 1% contribution to our reserve fund for capital and non-recurring expenditures.

House Bill 6618 proposes a change that would put regional school districts on equal footing with our peers by allowing for an annual contribution of up

to 2% of the annual district budget for the prior fiscal year. By supporting the passage of House Bill 6618, you will provide regional school districts the same abilities as our peers in single municipalities.

Anything short of this change will put regional school districts at a distinct disadvantage in terms of the cost savings that are available by using these non-lapsing accounts to save for larger expenditures, as opposed to having to borrow money at a cost through bonding. So that all of our towns and cities have the same financial opportunities to be fiscally responsible to our residents, I ask that you please lend your support to House Bill 6618, ensuring equitable treatment of all school districts in the state. Thank you for your time, and I'm available for questions if anybody has any.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, sir. I don't see any hands up at the moment, no. Okay, thank you so much for your testimony this afternoon.

IAN NEVIASERI: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next I have, Joey Listro. Joseph Listro.

JOSEPH LISTRO: Yes, good afternoon, Senator McCrory.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are.

JOSEPH LISTRO: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Joey Listro, I'm the Executive Director of New Britain ROOTS, and also serve in the New Britain Board of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to express support for House Bill 6621, specifically Section 3, which establishes a Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Grants Program.

Over the past decade, I've enjoyed a career as an organic farmer working closely to improve my community's relationship with food. I'm an advocate for educational programs and projects that support a child's understanding of where their food comes from. When students are engaged with meaningful experiences on a farm or in a garden, they are more likely to adopt healthier habits that last a lifetime. Nowhere is this more evident than when you're picking cherry tomatoes alongside a first-grader in the school garden they helped plant months earlier. New Britain ROOTS works with schools and teachers in implementing curriculum that supports STEM education through gardening and nutrition activities.

From the math of measure and plant growth to the science of soil tested and the discovery of worms, so much education happens for a child in my garden. My organization supports design and construction of gardens and greenhouses and our success is made possible by the passionate educators who are seeking new ways to engage children in hands-on learning. The grants program will open up opportunities for schools to better serve their students by increasing use in promotion of Connecticut-grown food in school cafeterias, and also providing training and technical services for us teachers and food service staff that support implementation of garden curriculum and food preparation using local ingredients. It also expands funding opportunities for schools and ECE sites to build outdoor garden spaces.

This work has been grown in our community for years. Back in 2013, we started a small vegetable garden, a small elementary school here in New Britain at the request of local school teachers. In the years that followed, we supported 16 new gardens, which contributed to over 8000 pounds of food grown by our students and returned back to the community. In recognition of the interest between students and teachers, New Britain schools introduced farming

into their elementary STEAM curriculum two years ago.

As our work expands throughout the state, we continue to receive more inquiries on Farm to School programs, especially with support in starting a garden or a greenhouse. State funding is needed to support the long-term viability of schools incorporating Farm to School activities in their schoolyards, cafeterias, and classrooms. The Farm to School Collaborative is requesting \$500,000 to fund this program. The collaborative stands ready to support the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the Connecticut Department of Education to make sure this program is successful. I thank you for your time, I urge you to support this Bill, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Joey, thank you so much for testifying today. I wanted to know, in regards to this program, because I know you've done work with preschoolers at HRA.

JOSEPH LISTRO: Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And so I was wondering if these grants would be available for preschool, like school readiness and daycare centers throughout the state as well?

JOSEPH LISTRO: Absolutely. The grants will be available for our Head start programs, ECE sites, including HRA. And this includes funding to build a garden, a greenhouse and support the foodservice program at the ECE sites to incorporate more locally-grown food.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for that answer. We do have a question from Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Joey, nice to see you. Just first of

all, thanks for the work that New Britain ROOTS is doing and for your service on the New Britain Board of Education. It's a thankless job, but one that definitely has to get done, so thank you for that. Representative Sanchez actually mentioned this to a prior speaker on this issue with regards to, if the funding is available, just wondering if you could talk a little bit about some of the possible barriers to funding this work and what we might be able to do to overcome them?

JOSEPH LISTRO: Sure. So, currently, the schools we partner with and work with, we have to get creative in how to fund these projects. So, it can range from, asking Home Depot for a donation of supplies to starting a, "GoFundMe," doing bake sales, one school right now or last year was doing a dress down day, and just really collecting dollars and pennies just to get something off the ground.

There are some small grants available from corporate organizations, for schools, and nonprofits to access to do some of this work. And then there's a large federal program at the USDA, but that program really is inaccessible to a lot of organizations. That's a \$100,000 grant program, and we're looking at schools to build a garden, and the funding for this would range between 5000-20,000 dollars per grant, enough money to kind of get off the ground, get something going, get a training in there for our teachers and staff to utilize the services better and build capacity within their school. So, we don't want to keep funding this work through a GoFundMe campaign, that's not how we want to promote really important educational initiatives.

REP. CURREY (11TH): And is there an estimated cost? So, you talked about like the \$5,000-20,000 dollars to get this going, is there an estimated cost for the out years or what this may cost the schools that take this on?

JOSEPH LISTRO: So, it's a \$500,000 request annually. And it's just basically a grant program that would get the schools engaged in this activity and hopefully put some of their school funds behind continuing to work in the future.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Excellent. Appreciate those answers. Happy St. Patrick's Day, I see your sweater. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative Currey. And I just want to say, Joey, I think it's going to take more than \$500,000 if we're going to do this throughout the whole state of Connecticut. And I hope we can get it, I hope we can.

JOSEPH LISTRO: Yes, they're somewhere.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yep. We have two more hands up. Representative Petit--Dr. Petit.

REP. PETIT (22ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Joe, for your testimony, and thank you for your service around town with sort of alternative educational programs that are hands-on, that I think are very effective. So I really appreciate you taking the time to come and testify and state your case, I think is very helpful from somebody right on the frontlines trying to serve the kids, so thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JOSEPH LISTRO: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Dr. Petit. Representative Veach.

REP. VEACH (30TH): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Joe. I just wanted to say, I think this is a wonderful thing that you're doing, I think it's critical that kids get a chance to explore the outdoor world, if you will, and tying it in with the STEM and STEAM, I think it's very, very important.

Have you reached out, just any of the foundations locally to help fund some of your programming? I know that there's quite a few of them, especially in our area here in New Britain, and I think this is something because it ties in education, and the outdoors, and getting things to kids that they normally would not have. And food is fuel, and it's important for them to understand how important that type of stuff is. Can you answer that?

JOSEPH LISTRO: So we are fortunate enough here in New Britain to have American Savings Foundation, which partners with a lot of nonprofits in providing out-of-school time programs. We run after-school programs, which is basically our foot in the door.

So if a school is interested in starting a garden or a greenhouse we will use some of the funds available through American Savings to get that off the ground. Unfortunately, I know, from my work at the collaborative and with others that do this work throughout the state, they may not have access to funds or have a really great community foundation that's willing to support this work and expand upon it. So, here in New Britain, both American savings Foundation, the Community foundation here in New Britain has really provided New Britain ROOTS with a lot of seed money to work with our schools and getting this off the ground.

REP. VEACH (30TH): Okay, great, great. I think it's wonderful, nice job. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank .you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I think that's all the questions for now. Thank you, Joey. Let's see, who do we have next? I don't have a last name, I just have Monica E, and I did see--

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): She represents, All Our Kin.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There we go.

MONICA EDGERTON: Yes. Hi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And then after Monica E we have--I have Debrow Giscombe.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Giscombe.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah. Okay, Monica.

MONICA EDGERTON: Thank you. Good afternoon, honorable Members of the Education Committee. My name is Monica Edgerton, and I am an early childhood outdoor education coach at All Our Kin, supporting family childcare programs in the areas of Stanford, Danbury, Norwalk, Bridgeport, and New Haven, and I am here speaking today in support of House Bill 6621, AN ACT CONCERNING FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

There are 2500 family childcare providers in Connecticut, caring for children ages zero through five, who are perfectly positioned to help set children's healthy habits and Education Foundation for success now and later in life. HB 6621 will support this in a number of ways. First of all, about half of the family childcare programs that we serve in Connecticut participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program to receive reimbursement for meals and snacks they give to the children. With more funding for Farm to School, programs like CACFP could provide incentives for childcare providers to buy local food.

Secondly, HB 6621 will help All Our Kins partnership with the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the UConn Extension office to promote farm to early childhood education in home-based childcare programs through coaching incentives, professional development opportunities, and technical assistance.

In addition, this Bill will also support other partnerships we have with local firms, such as Variegata farm and Stanford, Reservoir community farm in Bridgeport, and Common ground in New Haven to offer professional development workshops for family childcare providers and the community.

This work is important because we know that children have better outcomes when they eat well and when the food system and education system are set up for them to do so. As an outdoor education coach partnering with family childcare providers, I see firsthand when a two-year-old, like Zoey, of Crystal's Home Daycare program in East Haven, first discovers that the plants she has been watering sprout green beans that she can eat. Little Zoey doesn't really like the vegetables, but she kept going back to the bean plant over and over again to pull out more beans to eat.

Paula, another care-- a childcare provider in Bridgeport turned her whole backyard into a garden this summer to plant a plant's cucumbers, peppers, and other things so she could provide fresh vegetables to the children in her program without having to go to the store as often in the pandemic. In conclusion, children and childcare providers and local farms will benefit greatly from the support of HB 6621, AN ACT CONCERNING FARM TO SCHOOL. It will promote the healthy habits and provide a knowledge foundation that will help children to succeed now and for the rest of their lives. Please approve and fund this proposed legislation. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No questions, no.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Moving right on, we have--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Monica.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Monica, yes. Deborah.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see Deborah, so, I think we're in--the next person up is Tycharmell Denny, and then Ann Pratt.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Followed Ann Pratt, and followed by Scott Nicol.

TYCHARMEL DENNY: Yes, I'm here. Hello, everybody, good afternoon. Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee, hello, my name is Tycharmell Denny and I'm a New Haven resident. I am here to advocate for Senate Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Growing up here in the state of Connecticut there were a few to no teachers of color. I made it through the lack of diversity in the school systems, but I knew what I needed when attending. Now I'm not saying that teachers of Caucasian descent aren't good enough, but what I am saying is that these schools in low-performance districts need more cultural impact. In my experience, I grew up around kids who lived in broken homes, had nowhere to turn to, and nowhere to go. They still attend school but we're lacking academically due to poor moral support. There were guidance counselors who have tried to help but it never suffices. Why? Because they were not aware of the hardships that many children of color were facing. I mean, they had an idea but no experience.

It takes more than a degree to interpersonally connect with kids of color, especially ones who have

a rough life outside of school. There needs to be more diversity within the school system so that there could be more efficient academic progress. These kids don't need someone who has research on broken home trying to help them, they need connection.

Passing this Bill will encourage academic recovery and prove the diversity within the school systems and help stop systemic racism. I believe in the power of the people, so with me stretching my voice and you coming to a decision to pass this Bill will start breaking the cycle. I hope my testimony helps the process of decision-making. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We thank you, Tycharmell, for your testimony. Are you considering a career in education?

TYCHARMELL DENNY: I'm thinking about it, yeah. I'm into it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Well, I want you to back it up. You're talking about it, now be about it. All right.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Don't think about it, do it, do it, do it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none, we'll move right along. Ann Pratt, followed by Scott Nicol, followed by Andre Salazar.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I think Superintendent Nicol will be next because I don't see Ann Pratt on here.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Superintendent Nicol.

SCOTT NICOL: Okay, appreciate the opportunity here, Chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members, Berthel and McCarty, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Scott Nicol,

Superintendent for the Ellington Public Schools, and the Chair of the Legislative Committee for the Black Leaders and Administrators Consortium or otherwise known as BLAC.

I speak to you today in support of, with necessary amendments, but in support of Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, specifically addressing the statewide expansion of the Connecticut Teachers Residency Program. For context, the Ellington Public Schools, which enrolls 26% students of color, has approximately 3% teachers of color employed. The Ellington Public Schools is an early adopter, already with this program, having a resident teacher of color currently working with a mentor Ellington teacher. Ellington is committed to hiring this individual next year and Ellington is committed to this program for the foreseeable future.

Both the Ellington Public Schools and BLAC feel strongly that this program has the potential to have a great impact on the diversity in Connecticut's workforce, especially in suburban and rural school districts, which have clearly struggled in this area.

Two amendment recommendations for you to consider, the funding mechanisms, with the 10% being sourced from the Alliance districts, this may be challenging. To be clear, I'm not speaking for the Alliance districts but as a former executive director for the Hartford Public Schools, I am acutely aware that not all Alliance districts are created equal, from Windsor locks to Hartford to Derby, they are very different.

It is highly likely that most of the Alliance funds are already budgeted for in the next fiscal year. Further, the funding mechanism for suburban and rural districts isn't overly clear, and coupled with the language of the Bill it appears to indicate that upon completion of the TRP program, ending in the

hiring of the teacher, that grant funds will be retroactively provided to school districts by the State Department of Education.

If this is the case, this may dramatically decrease the number of school districts willing to take part in the program. Simply put, they won't be able to cover the costs for an entire year while waiting for the reimbursement. What we recommend is the Education Committee to incorporate at least 4.5 million into the general fund line to be included within the State Department of Education budget.

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Scott, you are at two and a half minutes, if you wouldn't mind summarizing, thank you.

SCOTT NICOL: I'm going to summarize, I appreciate it very much. And there's great-- this is all-- we're not talking about the why anymore, we're talking about the high-- the how, excuse me. So this is exciting on a lot of fronts, people are excited about the program, we think it could have a great impact. I would just ask the Education Committee to work with the necessary professionals to try to smooth out some of the amendments in the language in the funding and let's get this passed and move forward.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Just quick comments, first of all, Superintendent, I think-- appreciate the fact that your school district has already decided that diversifying your teaching population is something that's very important and you're working with the teacher, TRP program right now. That's a good sign.

In regards to, in the ways of how this program will be financed, paid for, that has not been determined but taking your considerations that we will have that conversation and see if we can fine-tune that. And I will say this in regards to Alliance districts, okay? And just not Alliance district, in

the districts in general, \$1 billion is about to come to the state of Connecticut. I'm not having a conversation about resources for the next two years, so we going to get this thing done. This is important, money is here, resources are available in schools, that's not a problem. Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee?

SCOTT NICOL: Thank you very much for your time. Appreciate it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, again, thank you for your testimony.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I think Andre Salazar. Yeah, I do see Andre Salazar.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Andre.

ANDRE SALAZAR: Hi, nice to meet you. Thank you, everyone, for giving me the time to speak. I'm not good at formalities, but I'll jump right into it. Good morning, my name is Andre Nicholai Salazar, I'm a member of Latinos for Education Advocacy and Diversity and I live in Stanford. I would like to support HB 6616 to ensure a better pathway to opening for approved charter schools and future charter schools. I believe that when opportunities come to provide more resources to our community, we should not be held back by bureaucracy and legislators who fail to prioritize their constituents' best interests. Just as President Joe Biden said, he would represent not only those who voted for him, but also those who did not.

Therefore, as these elected leaders make decisions, which not only impact their faithful supporters, but everyone else as well, keep in mind, that charter schools has people from many immigrants, minority groups, businesses, all of which are everyday Americans. Please see that we support the approval of HB 6616, as long as it contains enough funds for the charter schools that are already approved and a

more robust mechanism to ensure that future charter schools will not become pawns in political tugs of war. And to add to that, I appreciate Senator Douglas McCrory, for saying that there are funds, there are resources, we should be adding to our education system, not trying to pick and choose. It makes a lot of sense that we want to watch out for our kids, but we shouldn't be halting resources from coming until we find the perfect solution.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hi, Andre, it's so great to meet you. I wanted to ask you, we've had some testifiers come in and speak against 66-- the Bill that you're asking for, and they specifically say that the funding should go to the regular schools in the district. And I wanted to know why your opinion is different on that. Thank you.

ANDRE SALAZAR: I think that it shouldn't be a matter of choosing one or the other, I think it should go to both and seeing where we can improve on both. I think the fact is that we have enough resources, \$1 billion dollars is coming, I know that big picture, there's more just-- that money doesn't belong just to education, I know it belongs to helping local and health care and homeless people, but the fact remains that we do have a problem with our public education system, and just because we're consistently throwing money at it doesn't mean it will be the only answer, we can look out to other positive choices as well. That's what I believe.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any other questions from the Committee? Andrea, again, thank you for your--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, Representative Veach.

REP. VEACH (30TH): To you, Chair. Hi, Andre. I have another question that I just like to ask, in terms of accountability for these schools, I mean, you have to go through a vigorous, I hate-- I don't know if the word is licensing, but critiquing, if you will, what you offer through these schools, and you have to be accountable for what you're doing. I mean, somebody had mentioned earlier, there was a gentleman that was against this Bill, and didn't want monies being funded to them.

Can you explain a little bit the process of being approved for this, and being accountable for the type of education that you're offering?

ANDRE SALAZAR: Of course. As for I cannot speak on an expert level on how we become approved, I can speak with some information on how we can hold accountability. I understand that charter schools are held under contract with the state, and I know that they have to perform or they're not going to be-- how is it called? Reapproved for those contracts. So, I believe that's a powerful tool that the state can use, and if the state chooses to, I hope they can work with the local community as well to gain some opinion, and see how the charter schools impacting that local community in a positive or negative way. I believe is a very powerful tool.

REP. VEACH (30TH): Okay, fantastic. Thank you very much, I appreciate your time.

ANDRE SALAZAR: Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Andre.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other question? Thank you, Andre. Representative Sanchez, I think 59 just came, was actually--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Ann Pratt.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yeah, Ann Pratt. Ann, you're up?

ANN PRATT: Yes, I'm-- I am. I'm sorry. It's great to be with you. I am here, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee, testifying in support, in strong support of 1034, Senate Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. I had actually hoped that we were going to have some other people come and be able to testify instead of me, and I don't think that they could jump on today, so I am here for them.

Just to say that this is a really important Bill, as you know, we at Connecticut Citizen Action Group talk one-on-ones with teachers, parents, and students in Waterbury, in East Hartford, and New Britain, and we hear this issue again and again, about the need for teachers that look like them in the classroom. And they, many of them, maybe have one, if at best, one teacher teaching them, and they talk a lot about how that is something that they really want to change. So I know that there's been a lot of testimony, I want to thank you for putting this up, and Senator McCrory, I could not agree with you more, the funding coming from the federal government needs to support this program. We entirely support this effort, and just wanted to put in that sentiment with the Committee today. Thank you, again, for raising this Bill. We will do whatever we can to help you pass it.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No hands are up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Seeing none, we are moving on to our next presenter, and thanks again, Ann.

ANN PRATT: Thank you, Senator, and thank you, Representative Sanchez, appreciate it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. We have Roland--

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Roland Bishop.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Bishop, yeah.

ROLAND BISHOP: Good afternoon, can everyone hear me?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

ROLAND BISHOP: Oh, thank you. My name is Roland Bishop. I'm on my way home from teaching at Willard Cybulski Correction Facility. I'm a teacher there and I'm also a secretary-treasurer for CSEA, and I'm the president of the Teachers Union in Corrections. This is important.

I'm pulled over here in East Hartford and you're talking about resources, and the Unified School District #1 in Corrections has a lot of great programs. I'm going to talk about one, regarding the carpentry program, which is suspended right now because it needs to be modernized. So the ask is for bond funding, a meager amount, maybe 80-90,000 dollars, and I can go into some details with that. But the carpentry program at York CI, Niantic, the women's only prison, working with unions last year, we were able to take graduates from that program and get them interviewed with the construction trades so these women could take their skills, hopefully, get a union book, a union job, and get trained as they leave the facility.

It's a wonderful opportunity that we can expand, but we have to be able to run the program safely enough to code, so we need funding in order to do that. It's a school within the Department of Correction. The Department of Correction, as you know, has many needs, but I'm here for the school district and for

the funding that we can upgrade and get our vocational programs back online. Because we know 95% of those incarcerated are going to be released and education through re-entry programs work. One without the other doesn't work. They can't stand alone, they need to work with each other.

And listening to the prior testimony, I learned so much about what's going on and I would-- I really would like to have the public more involved in listening to this kind of testimony. And so that's my ask today, basically, the tax collection system, upgrade and IWA stations, upgrade in electrical to get the program back online because it's currently suspended, because there isn't funding in order to modernize it, and bring it back online. So, I really appreciate your time today and I really enjoyed listening in and hearing over the last half hour or 45 minutes, and I learned a lot. And I'd be willing to take any questions from you. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Roland, and thanks for coming on and advocating for the system that you're working. I've never had someone from Unified School District #1 come and advocate on the behalf of their students, and we'll-- I'll definitely take a look at that. I'm not quite sure will the funding come through State Department of Education or whether it comes from Corrections, but it's definitely something I will actually move forward to see if you can get that update equipment, because like you said 95% of people are coming home. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative Fiorello.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): You're muted.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You're muted, Representative. You're muted.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Oh, sorry.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to tell you, Mr. Bishop, that my father-in-law taught at the kinds of school that you're speaking about, and I'm very grateful you came on to talk about it, I'm happy to learn about it, and very nice to meet you. Thank you.

ROLAND BISHOP: Thank you. Welcome any tours of facility school. And I think the investment today, as I say, 95% will be released, and it's all about success. And I really thank you for your questions and your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

ROLAND BISHOP: Have a good day.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions? Okay, great.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Jammica Moore.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Jammica Moore but I don't think she's on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And then, Stanley Lord, President of the Bridgeport NAACP, he's on.

STANLEY LORD: Good afternoon, Happy St. Patrick's Day to all.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

STANLEY LORD: Before I start I have to congratulate my sister in Christ and my friend, Patricia Billie Miller, thank you, and congratulations on your new

position. Glad to see you in that office. I rise and to speak on SB number 1034, teacher recruitment, minority teacher recruitment, and retention.

Maybe we should add, may be administrative as well. Because just like we don't see as many teachers of color in our public schools, we do not see administrators. But that's not the point of this Bill, that'll be the next one that I'm sure you will bring up in the future.

First part, candidates for certification retention, in order to really be serious about recruiting minority teachers, I don't see anywhere in this Bill that addresses HBCUs and recruitment from that population. And we need to look at our praxis tests, maybe we can relax. A lot of our students who come from HBUs-- HBCUs already have taken the-- taken a test and feel that why should they come to Connecticut and then take another test. That's number one.

Number two, there's a part in your Bill that talks about waiting till students get to high school to introduce them to teaching. No, we reach students when they're younger, it should be middle school kids that you first introduce to the idea of teaching where their minds haven't been totally made up, so let's start that in the middle school level.

So that should be addressed and may be changed a little bit so that we will start in the middle school and not wait till we get to the high school levels in 12th grade when we can still mold them in our middle schools. So pretty much, we as the Greater Bridgeport NAACP support, of course, minority teachers. I'm kind of disappointed that our superintendent wasn't up on here nor was our President of our Board of Education on here as well, advocating for minority teacher recruitment and retention. So, please, please, let's pass this Bill and enhance it if we can, and move forward.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Lord, appreciate your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have, Representative Felipe.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I just want to thank Reverend Lord for being here, and I have just one quick question, and it's, I want to know what your experience has been in having relationships and seeking potential students at HBCUs. And also what your suggestions would be to make CT more attractive to HBCU students.

STANLEY LORD: Most of them-- I used to work in the ARC program years ago that the state of-- education department had, and one thing is our biggest barrier, of course, is the cost of living here in Connecticut.

So, one caveat or remedy to that was to provide some kind of a stipend for different areas whereby teachers could live-- potential teachers could live in, say, Bridgeport, and not have to deal with the high amount of rent, or and or mortgage in this area, so that's one way to do it, to have somewhat a stipend area, or they get a reduction or we have a specific building that set for them for apartments whereby they're at a reduced rate, and it's maybe they're subsidized by the state in some way afterward and move on from there. But that's probably the best way to do it, because when they're in the south, and they're paid a decent salary to come north and have to pay so much for the cost of living is a barrier.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. We have, Senator Miller.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr., and Mr. Chair. Mr. Lord, I want to say hello and welcome, and thank you for the work that you're doing in the Bridgeport NAACP, but I just want to say it's so good to see you and God bless you.

STANLEY LORD: Thank you. You always tell people it's good to be seen and not viewed.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): That's a good way of putting it, thanks a lot. Any other questions? Any other questions from the committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move right along. Thank you, Lord.

STANLEY LORD: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next up, Sam Galloway, Bristol Public Schools.

SAM GALLOWAY: Thank you. And good afternoon, Chairman McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members, Berthel and McCarty, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sam Galloway, I'm currently the Director of Talent Management for the Bristol public schools. I'm Vice President of Black Leaders and Administrators, an organization called BLAC. I'm also an executive board member of the Connecticut Association of School Personnel Administrators.

I'm speaking with you today in support of, with necessary amendments to 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, and specifically wish to address the statewide expansion

of the Connecticut Teachers Residency Program in partnership with the Regional Education Service Centers, RESC Alliance, which includes the originator of the program, CREC. TRP is aligned with the Bristol Board of Education's mission to recruit and retain a diverse teaching staff that is reflective of our school community. The Bristol Board of Education has been working diligently in pursuit of that goal and the TRP is a key component of the district's recruitment strategy.

You may not-- you may have heard this already, but currently, we're sitting at about 9.6 people of color in this field. Students of color, just under 40%. TRP is an alternative route to certification programs designed to recruit, certify, and retain elementary teachers of color from a largely untapped pool of talent.

We were early adopters, and currently, we have two candidates in the program. One of our candidates is an army veteran, and the other one is a former Par-educator and coach. These are two stellar examples of the program's immediate benefit to our communities. The funding mechanism for 1034 overlooks the number of current and future partner districts who are not Alliance districts. Currently, 17 of the 25 partner districts are not Alliance districts, and would not be eligible to benefit from this legislation as drafted. In addition, using this funding mechanism could strain those Alliance districts that need that support. And it was very promising to hear that other districts, besides Alliance school districts--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Sam, you are at two minutes 30 seconds if you don't mind summarizing.

SAM GALLOWAY: --are interested in this program. I would also say that it is also recommended to modify the definition of residency program. In the description, in Section 1, Subsection A3, changing 'and' to 'or'. Connecticut school districts with

local school budgets already submitted would not be able to fund this program unless the state allocates monies for the 21, 22 school year. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you there, Brother Galloway, for your testimony. Question, did you say that Bristol have two candidates in TRP program, currently?

SAM GALLOWAY: That's correct.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Excellent. And one who's a veteran and the other one came from your school district, correct?

SAM GALLOWAY: That is correct.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Great. And that's exactly how the program was designed, to help identify people who are already working in these school districts who have who have an affinity to education, who have demonstrated to the administrator they actually can do this work.

And that's why this program is successful and will be successful. And we'll find a way to fund it. I'll take into consideration some of your commentary on how the funding mechanism, we'll get to that. Like I said earlier, we have resources for the next two years and we have opportunity to do some great amazing things. I didn't comment on the previous speaker who talked about HBCUs, but we have studied that we-- this mechanism, this way, is the best way to go about growing your own. So again, thanks for your testimony. I want to move along. Any other comments from the Committee?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Sorry, Mr. Chairman, very, very quickly. I do want to go on the record just saying how valuable I believe this program is and that it will broaden out the TRP to other districts.

But I wanted to ask the superintendent, Galloway, we noticed that I think the issue is more the retention and the hiring, so that's why this program, I think, is very valuable, because we found that we had a number of teachers of color that were actually certified, but they were not hired. So, I'm interested if you have a comment on that? And if you think that this program will help in that regard? That's a major concern of ours on this Committee.

SAM GALLOWAY: Thank you, and I'll address that. I see it as a two-pronged issue. There's an issue with the hiring managers, right? So work needs to be done at that level, at the building level in the district level, to diversify the applicant pool.

It's very easy to continue to hire people who look like the Committee. And so, we at, least in Bristol, are educating our hiring managers, which would be principals and other members of our organization, pushing them to diversify the applicant pool, and to really peel away language like, "Not a good fit, not quite" all of that superfluous language, which really doesn't mean that the person can't do the job there.

And part of the reason, in regard to retention, is that candidates of color, especially if you work in a district that perhaps is not an Alliance School District, there's a feeling of isolation, right? So, building leaders and district leaders have to be aware of that. So if you're bringing in a person of color and the rest of the teachers are not people of color, they have to be in tune to that. "Does this person feel welcome? Am I giving them full access to leadership opportunities and professional development?"

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you so much, those too are important comments. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee? And I'll just add, also, in Section 5 of this Bill, it requires by July 1, 2023, each employee involved in the hiring process to complete a video training module addressing implicit bias. I think that's where we're having-- that's where we're going with that. So again, thank you, Brother Galloway, and continue your efforts with BLAC, great organization, needs to be promoted, need to be leaned on for their knowledge and resources. Thank you.

SAM GALLOWAY: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next up we have, Kate Field, followed by Daniel Pearson, followed by, Erick Tamay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, Erick Tamay.

KATE FIELD: Distinguished Members of the Education Committee, good afternoon, Happy St. Patrick's Day. My name is Kate and I'm with the Connecticut Education Association.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of HB 6621. Although respectfully, we request an amendment that would extend the educator evaluation flexibilities granted in Executive Order 7C into the 2021, 2022 school year. This extension would allow educators to focus on the social and emotional learning and well-being of their students, without fear that doing so may slow the pace of academic growth and negatively impact their performance rating. Extending these flexibilities would also provide time for the educator evaluation support council to make meaningful long-term changes to the evaluation guidelines. The need to reimagine teacher evaluation is now urgent.

After nearly a decade, student achievement remains stagnant and the opportunity gap persists. The emphasis on standardized measures of achievement has

contributed to over-testing a narrowed curriculum and rigid curriculum guides that leave little time for play or enriching educational experiences. Worst of all, student anxiety and depression have dramatically increased over the past decade, a trend greatly exacerbated by the pandemic and resulting school disruptions.

Extending the teacher evaluation flexibilities described in EO 7C will minimize further disruptions next year, provide more time for meaningful PD and SCL and give education-- educators the permission they need to focus on what matters most, the health and well-being of our kids. Thank you so much for your time and for all you do for Connecticut's children. I'm happy to answer any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. I don't see any questions here, no hands raised at this time, but thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony. Daniel Pearson. Hi, Mr. Pearson, you're next.

DANIEL PEARSON: Good afternoon. Dear, Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory, and Members of the Education committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of SB 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. My name is Daniel Pearson, I'm the state director for Educators for Excellence, Connecticut, a teacher-led organization with nearly 1000 members statewide that seeks to elevate teacher voice and policy decisions.

Today I submit testimony on behalf of our members who are current classroom teachers and who work tirelessly to ensure that our students have the best educational experience possible. These teachers and students are directly impacted by these policies and they urge you to pass this Bill. E for E is proud to stand with the Chairs of this Committee, again, as you continue to push to envelope on improving the teacher landscape in Connecticut.

In 2019 E for E worked with the leadership of this Committee to include culturally responsive pedagogy into statute and today stand in support and language-- in support of the language that requires districts to develop and make available, in consultation with the state Education Resource Centre, a video training module for school district personnel involved in or are responsible for hiring educators related to implicit bias and anti-bias in the hiring process.

In Connecticut teachers of color comprise only 8% of the educated workforce while over 40% of students today are children of color. Our student population continues to become more diverse yet our state and school districts struggle to reflect that diversity among teachers. The long-term benefits of being taught by high-quality teachers of color are clear and benefit all students. When students of color are taught by teachers of the same race, they feel more comfortable, show more interest and effort in their schoolwork, and have higher college aspirations.

Sadly, our students of color are experiencing a vicious cycle. Too many of Connecticut classrooms receive an education that fails to expose them to teachers of color who can serve as positive role models. Subsequently, we end up with few students of color who see education as a viable career path, and not nearly enough teachers of color recruited to join the next generation of educators.

With this Bill, we can strengthen the progress we've made in this area, by establishing a program aimed to recruit, certify, and retain teachers of color, ensure quality and-- I mean, ensure equity in hiring practices by requiring implicit bias or anti-bias training be completed by those in the hiring process and finally, promoting the teaching professions to students that will promote greater diversity in our teacher workforce, long-term. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Daniel, for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No questions, nope.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, again, thanks again, Daniel. Up next--

DANIEL PEARSON: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Erick Tamay, followed by Jiff Martin, and Nathan Estel.

ERICK TAMAY: Good afternoon, everyone. It's Erick.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Erick, yeah.

ERICK TAMAY: Yes. Alright, so this-- my testimony will be directed to the Senator, McCarty, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarty. And thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

As you already know, my name is Erick and I'm from Danbury and I'm here to speak on opposition of Bill, HB 6616. And I'm in opposition on behalf of, also, the ESL students from Danbury High School, as a former student myself. The reason that I oppose the Bill is because, right, we don't want charter schools in our city, first of all, and if this Bill were law, there will be no way for me to address the General Assembly about a school like Danbury Prospect coming into my community.

I am a [inaudible] of our public schools despite the challenges we face, and most of them has to do with funding. And as an immigrant, because to be part of the program of ESL students you have to be an immigrant who doesn't speak English. I understand the value of access to quality public school education for every student, and I wonder if I was

to go to a school in Danbury Public Schools and to all of our students-- all of my classmates, basically. I apologize I just saw knock my head on the door for a moment.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Take your time.

ERICK TAMAY: And also because-- just to share a bit of my experience right? In the --throughout my high school years I've also been advocating for better funding for ESL students and I've also testified, a few years back, on the same way, trying to see if I can light some light, add some lighting to the show like how the ESL program is mis-funded and how public schools, in general, are mis-funded.

And just bringing the charter school will be just like-- it won't address the needs of those students who, as many of you already know, Danbury High School is like-- Danbury is having a lot of increase of students, and especially students that do not speak English or know anything about it. And I also want to voice my support for SB 1034.

We all know that having teachers that look like us, it's important. And I found this very touching, because I remember I spent the whole of my freshman year helping my ESL teacher, trying to translate the classes, and trying to connect with the students because she herself didn't speak or couldn't connect with the students. She was [inaudible] she just found trouble trying to find translators for the students, so I had to be kind of like her right hand, all of the classes, trying to translate.

And every time she asked for resources, there was always a waiting list, which she had to wait quite weeks just to get computers, Chrome books. And so if it wouldn't be for me, she probably wouldn't have most of her students wouldn't have succeeded. And I think about it, right? It would have been easier, maybe the ESL teachers in the whole of like public schools in Danbury will have looked like us, because

probably there would have been a better-- more success for students. And I could go more in detail. Let me know if you have any question. I know that it's time-limited.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Erick, are you done, Erick?

ERICK TAMAY: Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Oh, Okay, I'm sorry. Any questions for Erick? Senator Kushner.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Hi, Erick, I just wanted to ask you a question. I know we spoke last summer, and at that time you were getting ready to enter UConn and I wondered-- I know you mentioned that you were a graduate of Danbury High School, and also I think you told me that you-- you told us all today that you struggled learning English in high school, how old were you when you came to Danbury? And then my second question is, how are you doing in UConn? I'm so proud of you for getting into UConn, it's a pretty cool place.

ERICK TAMAY: I've been doing good, great. Great, thanks for asking. Can you repeat the last-- the first question, I couldn't hear you well.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): I couldn't remember how old you were when you came to Danbury but I think you were pretty old, you were--

ERICK TAMAY: Yes, I went to Rogers Park Middle School, and then eighth grade till I graduated I went to Danbury High.

SENATOR KUSHNER (24TH): Right. Great, I just wanted to get it right. Well, you did really well and we're very proud of our students that graduate Danbury High School and end up at UConn.

ERICK TAMAY: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move on. Thanks again, Erick. Jeff-- I mean, it's Jiff Martin, followed by Nathan Estel and Margie Gill-- Gillis

JIFF MARTIN: Thank you, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez. My name is Jiff Martin, I'm a resident of Mansfield and a food systems professional. I work at UConn extension on sustainable food systems.

I'm here to provide strong support for Raised Bill 6621, and I would like to thank the Committee for bringing this up for public hearing today. My remarks are in reference to the concept of creating a Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program. I'm going to just go over a few features of the Bill.

Just to clarify my role in this, I currently direct a program called, "Put local on your tray," which we've been building since 2014. Really since the Obama Administration passed the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids ACT, which augmented the amount of fruits and vegetables on school-- in school lunch meals. There has been a pretty big uptick in interest around the concept of serving more local, and our program at UConn extension works with schools and school food directors to connect them to farms and local produce for their menus.

So just to review, a couple of features, one is this grants program would align with two existing grant programs at the Department of Agriculture right now, both of which are funded at 500,000. So the first is the Farm Transition Grants Program, which is for farmers, and then the Farm Viability Grants Program, which is for nonprofits in municipalities. So,

alongside those two existing programs, a new Connecticut-Grown For Connecticut Kids Grant Program would go a long way by creating a dedicated pool of funds, that is there for schools and early childcare centers, which is a second thing I want to emphasize is that, the language of this proposal would reach both K12 School-- K through 12 schools, as well as early childcare, which is a very important element to the movement, excuse me.

The Bill is also structured to ensure equity, so basically, to avoid or prevent opportunity hoarding, the grants would go first to those who apply from Alliance districts, those that show real community support for the proposals, and the awards would be in small increments, at least 10 Awards each round. The proposal would expand on existing statute, which is not clear in the proposed language, but it's Section 22-38D, which initially created the Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids week. And so we would have the week but now we would actually have a grant program. I want to emphasize that the only money for this type of work in the state is either the things that Joe Listro talked about earlier, the bake sales, he was talking about, the small gifts from Home Depot, or the larger federal grants, of which we might see two a year in our state.

Even our work at UConn Extension has had to rely on small increments of federal funding, not state funding, in close partnership and help with the State Department of Education. There hasn't been a lot of testimony yet about how much this benefits farmers, so in addition to a school district's wholesale accounts and distributors, school food directors are able to purchase locally grown products directly from a farmer through something called a micro-purchase, and this grants program could actually help increase the use of this micro-purchase tool.

It works very well for a school director that wants to feature something seasonal on the menu or run a taste test. And this is an important source of income for our many, many small farmers, which is another client that I work with through my job at UConn Extension, there's a lot of need for this type of market for small farmers.

Finally, I want to emphasize that this concept is very much in alignment with things that are going on nationally, our neighbors in New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, have made this sort of investment, and even gone much further. And so, this is really a start for us in Connecticut. Very excited, this would really go a long way to taking what we see happening around the state in small bits and level it up, scale it up so we can really get Farm to School to take off in our state. So, thank you to the Committee for listening to my testimony, I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): None, no.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We'll move on. Thank you again, for your testimony, Jiff. Nathan Estel, followed by Margie Gillis, followed by Sydney Clements.

NATHAN ESTEL: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Nathan Estel, and I'm the Vice President for Educator Certification at Pearson, and speaking today about Senate Bill 1035, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRE-SERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

I'd like to start by saying we are committed to working with the Connecticut State Department of Education to support the state's educational goals,

including providing services related to edTPA. As stated earlier today, edTPA is required by the Connecticut State Department of Education as the approved assessment of Educator Preparation Program Completion and is used by over 20 states for a similar purpose. I'll pause for just a second, I'm getting some background.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Someone needs to mute.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hey there, they muted.

NATHAN ESTEL: I will remind the Committee that the Stanford Centre on Assessment Learning and Equity or SCALE, at Stanford University, is the exclusive author and owner of edTPA. Assessment materials for the edTPA were created under their leadership, with input from teachers and teacher educators from across the country.

We are the operational part, providing the technical infrastructure to collect those candidate materials, we hire practicing educators to score those materials, and we deliver score reports to teacher candidates preparation programs and to the Department of Education. Additionally, we provide tools and software supporting the state and individual programs and their disaggregation and review of edTPA candidate performance data, for purposes of continuing improvement and national accreditation.

But we also see our role as a supportive partner to Connecticut's Teacher Preparation Program Community. In that regard, we offer additional services for teacher education candidates, for in-service teachers, and for teacher candidates. Let me start by saying we provide financial assistance vouchers for Connecticut's teacher candidates who most need assistance paying for edTPA. We also offer free webinars to support any candidate who's completing edTPA, as they prepare their portfolios. Our candidate contact center answers questions via

telephone, email, and chat. So candidates have answers to their questions about the assessment and how to prepare their portfolio in a timely manner.

Also, in collaboration with Stanford University, we continue to offer professional development for teacher educators and in-service teachers to enhance their ability to support candidates completing the assessment. In fact, since February of 2015, we have delivered over 20 workshops for Connecticut's Teacher Education Community, focus on topics of emerging need, and we also support monthly virtual meetings with representatives from each of the state teacher preparation programs.

CLERK: Sorry for interrupting, you are at 2 minutes 30 seconds if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

NATHAN ESTEL: Additionally, we regularly provide national subject-specific topical webinars for practicing teachers and teacher educators, and we invite our colleagues from Connecticut to join any of those workshops. We hope to continue to offer these services on behalf of and with the Department of Education. I'll close by saying, I appreciate your time today and if you think I can be of assistance as this Committee continues to examine edTPA, or its use in Connecticut, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you again.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I have a quick question.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yeah, Representative.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): How many teachers presently are in the process of going through edTPA that are teachers of color? And how many teachers of color have gone through that process as-- since it's been implemented in 2015?

NATHAN ESTEL: Representative Sanchez, I don't have those numbers on top of mind, nor do I have them at my fingertips, that they are in-- those numbers-- that information is all self-reported from the candidates, and we do communicate that information to the Department of Education. So respectfully, I'd like to ask for some time to work with the Department of Education and get that information to you in a secure way from them.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay, but correct me if I'm wrong, I thought that when they go through this process, that Pearson gets that information and then reports back to the-- and to SDE.

NATHAN ESTEL: Yes, sir, that is correct.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Is that correct?

NATHAN ESTEL: That is correct. And I'm just asking for time to gather that information and get it to you in a secure way.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. I don't see any other questions here.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No. Okay, thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

NATHAN ESTEL: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): All right. Next up, Margie Gillis, followed by Sydney Clements, followed by Richard Velky.

MARGIE GILLIS: Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee, my name is Margie Gillis, and I'm here to provide testimony as an enthusiastic supporter of House Bill 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND

ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY GAPS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

I'm the president of Literacy How and a member of the Connecticut Literacy Model Team. And in those roles, I've seen, firsthand, how impactful research and evidence-based instruction is. Without it, districts across our state have data to present that exemplify these opportunity gaps with high percentages of children reading below proficient, aka, grade level, House Bill 6620 will establish the Centre for Literacy Research and reading success, and it will coordinate efforts to address the opportunity gap and equity in our public schools.

This Bill will require all districts to demonstrate the use of reading curricula and materials and screening assessments that are based on the evidence in the science of reading. And the science of reading, as a quick definition, is interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based reading, research about reading, and issues related to reading and writing.

And the research has culminated in over 50 years of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop, and why some, in fact, many children struggle learning how to read. For the past 20 years, our coaches have worked with teachers in their classrooms so that they learn how to apply the research and evidence-based practices to ensure children learn to read well. And a frequent comment that we hear is that teachers didn't learn this content in their teacher prep programs. And in fact, some have openly wept in front of us, thinking about the children that they've failed to teach to read. I assure you, no teacher wants to carry that burden, we know the cost to the child.

As members of the state's Education Committee, you recognize the importance of prevention and early intervention. Chairman McCrory, you know, firsthand, what happens when students pass from elementary school to middle school without the

requisite reading and writing skills, it means they cannot access the content, the disciplinary knowledge, and--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, you are at two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

MARGIE GILLIS: Sure. As a result, the gap widens and many of these students, though intelligent and capable, lose their motivation to learn and drop out of school. The impact, moral-- the economic and moral costs are huge and incontrovertible. Rather than maintaining the status quo and allowing the opportunity gaps to persist, let's gather our political will and distinguish ourselves as a state that puts children at the center of our educational system. Their lives depend on it. Thank you very much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Margie, and thank you for all the work you've been doing in Connecticut and across this country, around reading, teaching teachers how to be, and all the efforts you've done since I've been working with you and knowing you for the last five, six years. And I'm glad you're enthusiastic support of this piece of legislation. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Senator Miller.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Oh, I didn't see. That's Senator Miller with her hand up?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): That's Senator Miller, go right ahead.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate you acknowledging that I had my hand up. Hi, Margie, how are you? I hope all is well.

MARGIE GILLIS: I am great, thank you, Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): And I want to agree with my Senator, McCrory, and thanking you for the work that you've done around literacy and being a good partner with the work that the Black and Puerto Rican classes has done around literacy.

But I wanted to ask you a question, so we removed text comprehension from the Bill and we replaced it with reading fluency, including oral skills, and reading comprehension. And so, there seems to be some concern that children will not think or know what they're reading as they read it, that they won't be comprehension and that, especially, that it's going negatively impact English learners, and so, do you have any thoughts around that?

MARGIE GILLIS: Yeah, I actually do. I think that it's very much a part of-- reading fluently is a proxy for comprehending, if you can read text fluently, by and large, it demonstrates that you can comprehend what you're reading. It is not a replacement, because we know there are many children who can read fluently and they fool us, because they aren't making meaning.

But we did put text comprehension in that language. And I think that what's happened a lot of times is we're pitting the foundational skills against comprehension and making people think that all we really care about is getting kids to read the words, when in fact, we believe wholeheartedly that the ultimate goal of learning to read is to be able to comprehend the text that you're reading. So by no means does this say that comprehension is not important, it is absolutely paramount. And yet, if you can't read the words, you will not be able to comprehend the text. So I think we're just trying to cover all the aspects of reading through that language.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Okay, thank you very much.
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other
questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No Other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move on.
Thanks again, Margie, for your testimony.

MARGIE GILLIS: You're most welcome. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Sydney Clements, followed
by, Richard Velky, followed by William McCullough.
Sydney,

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No Sydney.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I think, Pastor McCullough is
up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): No Sydney, no Richard.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Nope.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Pastor McCullough

PSTR. WILLIAM MCCULLOUGH: Man, thank you for this
opportunity, man. I'm so happy to be able to
testify today, didn't get a chance last time. And
so I want to just congratulate you Co-Chairs,
McCrorry, and Sanchez, and all of you, Ranking
Members, and Representatives and Distinguished
Members of this Education Committee for this
opportunity.

Also want to congratulate Senator Miller, for her
election win and being a part of the Senate now,
congratulations on that. So, thank you all for
allowing me to appear today. My name is Pastor

William McCullough, I'm a senior pastor at Russell Temple Church in Bridgeport, I'm the president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Bridgeport and vicinity, and I'm also the founder of FaithActs for Education.

So I'm here today on behalf of 80 congregations and countless children and families across our state, who make up the FaithActs family. We support Senate Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

As you know, our efforts this year have centered on making sure that our children see education justice, and they see it now. So for far too long, Black and Brown children in low-income families in our schools have been told, just to get by with what you have, as meager as that is, or just wait, we getting to you, and just after we do these other things first. And help never comes. That's why we are so excited for the transformation in the legislature, especially in this Committee, it feels so good to see people who look like us, who come from where we come, making decisions about our families, and our schools.

I want to especially thank you, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez, for your commitment to justice and equity, and for your tireless efforts to increase the numbers of Black and Brown teachers in our public schools. We hope, as a people of faith, and we also pray that 2021 is the year that solidify previous progress made on minority teacher recruitment. We believe that this Bill will put us on a concrete path to recruit and retain more educators of colors, and eliminate the discrimination we know that exists in hiring practices. The data tells us that students of color excel when they have access to educators of color, and this is why my daughter is an English teacher at Central High School in Bridgeport, but unfortunately, she is one of few. In Bridgeport, over 86% of the students are Black and Latino.

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, you have two or three seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

PSTR. WILLIAM MCCULLOUGH: 74% of the teachers are white, only 12% of the teachers are Black, and only 11% Latino. In New Haven, the same thing. Statewide, nearly half the public school children are Black and Latino and the numbers are growing, yet only 8%-- 1 in 10 look like them.

As I come to a close, what's worse is that many of these educators don't live in the communities they teach in, they don't send their children to the public schools they teach at and they don't pay taxes in districts that provide their paycheck. And this lack of diversity in our teaching force doesn't impact students of color. Countless students show the benefit of all students having access to teachers of color.

Teachers is a noble profession, and aside from parents, teachers may have more influence over young lives than members of any other profession. And you know what it means when children see themselves in the educators teaching them, people who look like them, understand their experience, and can be role models, and show them what their past can look like, you know, the transformative power this has over what they think is possible. So vote yes to Senate Bill 1034, so that every student in this state has access to a quality education, and most importantly, phenomenal teachers of color. Thank you for your time and may God continue to bless all of y'all in this endeavor.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony, pastor, and thank you for all the work you've done and doing for children in the state of Connecticut. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I just, for this privilege, it's just a comment, first of all, Pastor McCullough, I want to thank you for your wonderful passion and for your interest in this topic. But I would just like to comment to you that we've all worked very hard to ensure that this happens in all of our districts, and so I want you to just realize that this is truly a bipartisan effort. And I just felt compelled to let you know that, in case you had not thought of that, but it is true, we're all working on this together. So, thank you.

PSTR. WILLIAM MCCULLOUGH: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Representative McCarty. I was going to say the same, that we're all working together on this. So thank you, Pastor McCullough.

PSTR. WILLIAM MCCULLOUGH: That's good news.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Who's up?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have, let's see.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Denise. Denise Estemil.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And then after that, Shannon Raider.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Ms. Shannon Raider.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Is Denise on?

DENISE ESTEMIL: Good afternoon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are.

DENISE ESTEMIL: Yes, I'm here. Yes. Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is

Denise Estemil, I am a resident of Trumbull, Connecticut, and I stand as an ally in support of Senate Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

I am a Hispanic woman and the first in my family to have the opportunity to attend college and earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut. It wasn't until years after I graduated from the University of Connecticut that I realized I wanted to pursue a career in teaching.

My love for working with children kept me in the education field for over 20 years as a paraprofessional, reading and math interventionist, and a bilingual teacher under a provisional license. I have worked in various districts, such as Bridgeport, Connecticut, Brooklyn, New York, and I currently work in Trumbull, Connecticut. While working in these districts, I have the opportunity to work with great administrators, social workers, and teachers who have encouraged me to pursue my teaching certification.

I was ready to pursue my teacher degree years ago, but unfortunately, I constantly came across a financial wall. I also have the responsibility of a wife and a mother. My family's well-being was my number one priority. I looked into programs and attended information sessions that promise to pay for my teaching degree, but it required me to quit my paying job to work with a district with no salary.

I became discouraged, until I came across the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program. After attending their informational meeting, I immediately became excited. I couldn't believe that there was a program that would allow me to have freedom to work while providing a salary and benefits to complete my student teaching. This was big for me because I could continue to financially provide for my family.

In addition, I would be assigned a coach to guide, support, and help me unlock my full potential.

I saw this as an opportunity to finally obtain my teaching degree to succeed, to further build my confidence, my skill set, and to be an example to my own children. Regardless of whether I get chosen for the program, this program gives me hope that minority candidates across Connecticut have an opportunity to become role models for students of color, teach diversity, and give Caucasian students an opportunity to embrace perspectives different from their own. I support Senate Bill 1034 and hope the Committee will vote favorably to fully fund the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program at 4.5 million annually. Thank you for allowing me to share my experience.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any hands up, but, Denise, I hope you do get accepted. Thank you.

DENISE ESTEMIL: Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Shannon.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So we have, Shannon and she's on, I see that she's on. And then after Shannon, we have, Amy Dowell.

SHANNON RAIDER: Good afternoon. Hello to the Honorable Members of the Education Committee, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez. It's been a long day for everyone here. I am speaking in support of fully funding Bill 6621. Specifically, Section 3, to fund Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut kids.

Again, my name is Shannon Raider and I'm very excited to see this Bill before the legislature with all the important Bills being raised today. This

Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids legislation is not only about the state clearly saying that we understand and care about the integrity and quality of school meals that our children have access to, but it also recognizes the vitality of local agricultural relationships in communities across the state. This Bill conserved to democratize access to local sustainably grown food and unlock resources across the board for food literacy education.

I work as an advocate for our Farm-to-school program, Put Local on Your Tray, out of UConn extension. I'm also the parent of a New Haven public school student who eats and benefits from free lunches, and as a once next-generation farmer, I firsthand experience the challenges of accessing institutional and growing markets, such as the school market.

I've also been an educator who has worked for almost-- I can't believe it, two decades, to grow food literacy among young people in urban gardens, out in the countryside, educational farms, in classrooms, chicken coops, and wherever soil and curious hands could meet. I have seen Farm-to-school across these experiences and this Bill would be a significant, small, and first step inequitably providing Farm-to-school programming as a universal opportunity across districts. It would also give next generation farmers including, BIPOC and urban farmers a boost in reaching this new and fast growing market of schools.

As was mentioned before, this Bill provides an-- could provide an infusion of dollars for districts to increase direct purchasing from farmers, paving the way for more effective procurement relations.

CLERK: Ms. Raider.

SHANNON RAIDER: Yeah.

CLERK: If you can summarize.

SHANNON RAIDER: Oh, I have so much more. Shortening the distance between our local farms and schools not only brings economic, environmental, and educational benefits, but it can do so with a sharpened lens on racial, economic, and food equity. We hear food service instructors over and over again saying how they want this. They want this for their schools, for their students, for the families and our farmers absolutely need a boost in accessing these new and growing markets so we can stay competitive within the region.

Selling to schools is one of the fastest growing institutional markets, according to Farmed Institution survey from 2017. So it's grown even more since then. The local food movement has been a luxury and we see districts across the spectrum going above and beyond to bring local sustainably grown food into the cafeterias, from Hartford, Naugatuck, Mansfield, and Southington, food service directors and farmers going above and beyond, paying more, and earning less just to get local food in.

So by resourcing and funding local food through our public schools with increased procurement dollars, money for educational programming, and empowered local collaborations, this is a path to democratizing access to the local food economy that is a universal Right. Well-funded, meaningful state support for Farm-to-school, like other-- many other states have done, is a powerful tool to measure the barometer of food justice, serving nutritionally and culturally representative schools and empowering the next generation of farmers. We know that when the quality of food meals in schools goes up, meal counts increase, and funding increases, providing a positive feedback loop. Kids respond--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Ms. Raider, can you summarize, because your time is up.

SHANNON RAIDER: I'll end there.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. And you did submit written testimony, didn't you?

SHANNON RAIDER: I didn't, but I can email my full testimony to the Committee.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, please do so. Please do so because it--

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah, you're absolutely correct, it is a very important Bill and we would love to see it go through. Let's see, I don't see any other hands. I don't see any hands up, so thank you. Thank you so much, Ms. Raider, for your testimony.

SHANNON RAIDER: Thank you all for your time.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have--

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Amy Dowell.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Amy Dowell, yeah.

AMY DOWELL: Hi there.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

AMY DOWELL: Hi. Co-Chairs, McCrory and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Barry and Daugherty Abrams, Ranking Members, Berthel, and McCarty, and Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Amy Dowell, I'm here representing Education Reform Now, CT, and I'm part of the Right to Read CT Coalition here. My testimony is going to, mostly focus on 6620, but I'd also just like to voice support and herein support for HB 6619, Senate Bill 1033, and Senate Bill of Bill 1034, as well.

So I want to thank Senator Miller, first of all, she's really been our leader, Majority Leader, Rojas, also, and so many leaders in the Black and Puerto Rican caucus who have been tireless on this issue of literacy. So, the COVID-19 crisis and the Connecticut literacy crisis are converging at this very moment, and it's giving us the chance to do something lasting and bold for Connecticut students. And if we establish the statewide literacy strategy, it will position us to overcome the enormous toll that the pandemic has taken on Connecticut children.

It could close opportunity gaps, better prepare students for their futures, apply for significant, additional federal funding, beyond the COVID relief funds, and reap long-term benefits for children. It's a comprehensive approach and it incorporates curriculum programs, teacher preparation programs, Higher Ed, district leadership.

No one single part of this plan should really stand alone, we must do all these pieces together to really see the results. So the Right to Read Bill meets this very important moment for Connecticut students and educators in three ways. It addresses the academic crisis exacerbated by COVID-19, it addresses the bigotry, really, of low expectations reflected in ongoing opportunity gaps by race in our state, and it addresses the moral and economic imperative to prepare all Connecticut students for college and career. As an organization, we always consider-- we're always considering issues through the lens of what is best for children and for students, what we-- what will provide high standards, promote excellence.

Fortunately, through this process over the last year, we have worked side by side with partners who feel exactly the same way and we're grateful for the partnership with SCE, UConn, YAG, Literacy How, HILL for Literacy, Steven Hernandez at the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors equity opportunity, and the

CBIA affiliate ready CT, just to name a few of our partners, our core partners here. And we've also partnered with district leadership, communities including Stamford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Middletown, Colchester Wallingford, to name a few.

CLERK: Ms. Dowell.

AMY DOWELL: Yeah.

CLERK: If you can summarize, please.

AMY DOWELL: Yep.

CLERK: Thank you.

AMY DOWELL: While we've had a true partnership in developing this work with SCE, we know that funding administration department leadership can change every year, and we know that while many of the department are deeply committed to this effort, as they testified earlier, the department has repeatedly raised the issue of capacity on a variety of initiatives and showing reluctance sometimes to require districts to consistently adopt research-based approaches to reading, and to offer oversight.

So I'm hopeful that our partnership will continue and we can work together to find a real way to ensure the work continues. So every student in Connecticut should have the right to read, and we know what is required to meet that goal. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Senator Miller.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I see Senator Miller.

AMY DOWELL: I can't hear her.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): You're muted.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): I think you're losing your hearing, Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. So, no, I'm sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Amy, I just want to say thank you for your leadership on this Bill.

It's been frustrating to me that we haven't been able to grow the work on literacy to the scale that it needs to be. And so, with you and the other partners, we're able to do that, and were able to take it outside of the LOB. Unfortunately, no, it's unfortunate that it took COVID for us to realize that we need a comprehensive, statewide literacy plan. And so again, I want to thank you for your work and being a partner on this initiative. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

AMY DOWELL: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No Other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we're moving on. Thank you again, Amy. Jennifer.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And then after, Subira Gordon, and Nicole Grant after that.

JENNIFER BARAHONA: Okay, good afternoon, Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 1034.

My name is Jennifer Barahona, I'm a resident of Fairfield and the CEO of Norwalk ACTS, a collective impact effort in Norwalk working to improve the outcomes for children and youth from cradle to career. We provide data support to the Norwalk public schools, and just yesterday released a disproportionality and equity dashboard that shows

troubling trends and overrepresentation of students of color and discipline, and special education, as well as underrepresentation in areas of academically talented and gifted. Sections 4, 5, and 6 of this Bill address anti-bias training and education are absolutely critical if we're going to make a difference in these trends that have been allowed to persist for far too long.

Norwalk is in the middle of a strategic planning process, and I'm honored to be a member of the task force working on the development of that plan. The issue of minority teacher recruitment comes up in every conversation we have.

We've heard loud and clear from students, parents, educators that this is one of the highest priorities for the district. However, just recruiting more BIPOC teachers into our district only creates further disparities in the districts they are coming from and does nothing to solve the issue across our school systems. So we must work deliberately and with urgency to create a pipeline of teachers to meet the demands in all of our communities. I also happen to be married to a public high school teacher, my husband is among the rare group of Hispanic male teachers, and I have the privilege of witnessing the influence that he has had on hundreds of young people who still write to him, years and years later.

Without fail, they talk about his enthusiasm, deep connection, and care of his students, his ability to truly teach them the Spanish language, and what an enormous difference it's made in their chosen careers. My husband benefited from the alternative route to certification program in the early 2000s. And at the time, it was the only feasible way for him to earn a living while becoming a certified teacher. He has since gone on to get his master's and is working on his six-year degree. Expansion of programs such as ARC are essential if we're truly committing to increasing the number of minority

teachers and thereby improving outcomes for our young students of color. Happy to take any questions, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. I don't see any hands up, so thank you again, thank you for your testimony.

JENNIFER BARAHONA: Thank you for the opportunity.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I have, Subira Gordon, is next. Hi Subira.

SUBIRA GORDON: Hi. Co-Chair 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'm the executive director of ConnCAN. Today I'm here to testify in support of Senate Bill 1034, 1033, and House Bill 6619 and 6620. ConnCAN is in full support of this year's version of AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

Dr. Murray Sweeney, Chief Equity Officer of Chicago Public School, in a webinar said, "In order to really advance equity work-- in order to really advance equity work, we have to talk about mindsets, relationships, and partnerships, resources, and policy. When we think about the invisible tax, it has a relationship to all those things." A few years ago, Senator McCrory shared a story about a young boy that said he did not want to return to the scene of the crime, meaning his school. That stuck with me, because stories like that challenge us as a state to open opportunities for students to feel connected to learning and their school experiences.

While this work can feel heavy and overwhelming, it is working. Recently, Windsor voted to have its first Black Superintendent, Dr. Hill, as an example

of why this work matters. The residency program in partnership with the Grow Your Own Pathway allows students to have that window that Rudine Sims Bishop wrote about, the window to see what students can become. She also wrote that, when the light hits the window in a certain way, it becomes a mirror. That reflection is what will challenge us, as a state, to continue to do more. There are several studies about implicit bias and the role it plays in the decisions that human resources professionals make. A name that sounds too ethnic is dumb pause, a person who is not well dressed will not be considered and the list goes on and on.

It is important to create an environment, at the district level, that addresses the hiring of educators through a lens that does not have bias. If biases intentional and unintentional are addressed to training, then candidates of color can finally be given the opportunities to step into classrooms and other spaces in the education system and begin to create a more diverse educator workforce. ConnCAN thanks Senator Miller and the Members of the BPRC that have been leaders in the fight for literacy. Literacy Skills determine future outcomes, students who cannot read fluently by the age of-- by grade three face an uphill battle to graduate from high school, college attendance, and job placement. Less than 6 in 10 students in Connecticut are on track to college--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, you've hit your two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

SUBIRA GORDON: With some communities, fewer than 1 in 10 are on track, including a school in New Britain, Bridgeport and three schools in Hartford. For overall district performance for ELA , 20% of students in New Britain are on-- are at or above grade level, 24% of students in Hartford are at or above grade level, 27% of students in Bridgeport are at or above grade level, and 30% of students in

Waterbury are at or above grade level. I want to thank you for your time today, and I welcome any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Subira, for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Just want to thank Subira for the work she's done in the past. And those numbers are just heartening. When you talk about 20%, 30%, they all should be at 100%. All our kids should be able to read once they're out of third grade and it's sad that I hear numbers all the time that certain students reaching third grade and reading at a first-grade level or below, it's just not right. But thank you for your work.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes, Ms. Gordon, thanks for all the work you've been doing for the last, I'll say, 10 years trying to advocate for those who do not have a voice, appreciate you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Up next--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Nicole, we have Nicole Grant, and she's on.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Nicole.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi, Nicole. Just waiting for you to unmute yourself. There you go.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): There you go.

NICOLE GRANT: Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members McCarty, and Berthel, and each Distinguished Member of Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Nicole Grant, and I'm the Director of Finance of Regional School District 12. We serve the towns with Bridgewater, Roxbury, and Washington. This is the first time I've attended a hearing of this Committee. I'm in awe at the volume and complexity of the issues your Committee addresses in such a meaningful way. So again, thank you, I'm glad that I had the opportunity to spend so much time today to hear from everyone.

I came to speak in support of House Bill 6618, specifically Section 3. You heard much earlier from the Chair of my Board, Mr. Greg Cava, and a short time ago, the Superintendent of region 18, who also spoke in support of this Bill. Both men who came before me spoke very eloquently in support of the Bill, and I think Representatives Corney [sic] and Senator Berthel for their earlier comments in support of this Bill as well. House Bill 6618 will allow regional school districts to better manage potential unexpended funds at the end of our fiscal year, and to build much-needed reserves for capital projects. Reserves are crucial to the upkeep of our facilities that serve our children and are impactful means to avoid borrowing in order to control the annual cost of debt service to our taxpayers.

As the operating class of personnel benefits, supplies, and services to support our students continue to increase year to year, capital projects are often delayed in an attempt to limit the increase to the regional budget, which is subject to test for approval referendum.

To give a specific example, for the fiscal year ended 2020, region 12 we return over \$1 million to our three towns. At the same time, we must actively seek to fund \$3 million for several necessary facilities projects. Some of these projects could have been paid for from our approved non-lapsing account funds. Had the prior Bill included regional school districts, region 12 would be in a position today to reduce the upcoming borrowing by more than

20% and several of these projects would be complete and in place for the safety and welfare of our students and staff. As this correction comes at no cost to the state, I'm hopeful that you will pass Bill 6618, and allow regional districts the same opportunity to establish needed reserves as was previously afforded to municipal districts. I would like to add the additional requests that if it is all possible that this could be effective for fiscal year 2021. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions for Nicole?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We don't have any questions. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Nicole.

NICOLE GRANT: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We'll move on. Darlene.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So we have--

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Darlene.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah. I was just saying we have Darlene Kascak, then Tathiana Bueno, and then Aram Ayalon.

DARLENE KASCAK: Good evening, Mr. Chair, Senators, Representatives, and all the Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about my support of HB 6619, AN ACT CONCERNING DEVELOPMENT OF A KINDERGARTEN TO EIGHTH GRADE CURRICULUM, and allowing me to share my passion for the need to teach more in-depth Native American Studies in our schools.

My name is Darlene Kascak, I'm the education coordinator for the Institute for American Indian Studies, a Museum and Research Centre. I am also an enrolled member of the Schaghticoke tribal nation. I have witnessed and experienced firsthand, the results of what comes from not teaching the true history of the state of Connecticut in the country that we live in today.

With our education programs at the museum with children, we witness a transformation in the way that children view and think about Native Americans, both in the past and present. When they begin the program, we ask them what comes to mind when they hear Native American people. And the images that they talk to us about are images of teepees, feathers, and primitive people who were here only in the past. After they experience our program, and after we teach them about Native American culture, their way of life, and their ongoing history, and the-- they leave with a better understanding of why some of the conflicts arose in our past. Even many of the teachers and adults that accompany them often ask, "Why didn't they teach me this in school growing up?"

Today's narrative in our curriculum begins with an overly simplistic story of cooperation with the coming of the Mayflower and the first Thanksgiving story. When that cooperation later turns into disagreements, Indigenous people are generally pitted against the colonists and seen as the enemy in the conflict of-- within United States development. Once students get past the Louisiana Purchase, the Homestead ACT, Westward expansion, and the reservation system, everything seems to be settled and done. This story implies that Indigenous people or the 'Indian problem' was dealt with once they were removed to reservations. Students do not--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Darlene, you are at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

DARLENE KASCAK: Students do not truly learn the reasons why some of these conflicts arose, because they're only hearing one side of the story. And sadly, this is the narrative that is presented to students leading up to the 1900s.

I believe there are many, many lost opportunities for learning by omitting Native American Studies, in-depth Native American Studies, in our curriculum. There are so many valuable life lessons that children can learn from the Indigenous culture, living with the land, appreciating the gifts from the land. Our schools today are very diverse, and we need-- that diversity needs to be represented in what we teach as well.

And I want to say thank you for allowing me to share my passion, it's really important to me, what we teach children about Native American people. There is so much deep, rich history here in Connecticut that we're not even getting into, the Pequot war, King Philip's War, the Treaty of Hartford. When we expose children to these things from different perspectives, they're able to form their own opinions about these subjects, and this is what we want children to be able to do when they're adults in the future. Thank you. And I'm welcome-- You're welcome to ask any questions you'd like.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Darlene, any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any hand. Thank you, Darlene, so much for your testimony today.

DARLENE KASCAK: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have, Tathiana Bueno, and then, Aram Ayalon. I see Tathiana.

TATHIANA BUENO: Good afternoon. Thank you, all, for being here and listening to a small part of my story. My name is Tathiana Bueno, I'm a current student at Danbury high school and I come here today to ask you all to support HB 6616.

Every day I experience what it's like to attend a school that is struggling to accommodate so many students. The fact of the matter is that our Danbury schools need help, and my community has repeatedly shouted from the rooftops what that need is. Over 4800 residents have signed petitions and sent thousands of emails begging to fund a charter school that was already approved by the Board of Education. Only for our pleas to fall on the deaf ears of our Danbury delegation.

We're asking the Education Committee to write this terrible wrong and injustice. I ask you again to please support HB 6616 and to allocate funds for a charter school in Danbury and my diverse community is truly in desperate need. Thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Tathiana, for your testimony. Very important-- what year are you in school?

TATHIANA BUENO: It's my senior year of high school, last year.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. And what's your plans for next year?

TATHIANA BUENO: Air force.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Great, great.

TATHIANA BUENO: Yeah.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): I'll say, thanks for your service, in advance.

TATHIANA BUENO: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I was just hoping she would say education, but Air Force is okay.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions? Any other questions? Thank you. Thank you, Tathiana.

TATHIANA BUENO: Anytime. Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next up is, Professor Ayalon.

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Hello everyone. Can you hear me?

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yes, we can.

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Committee, I'm honored to come testify at your place, say, for the second time. Last year I was privileged to be part of the working group on EDTPA and testify also on that and wrote a minority report on EDTPA.

So I'm here to support SB 1035, and I've been a teacher educator for 32 years, before that, a high school science teacher, and I've seen-- I've done a lot of research on EDTPA. I read, I would say, hundreds of articles on that, and the overall majority of research, and I think I believe like you probably believe in science, and the majority of articles are against EDTPA.

Let me give you a few reasons why I'm supporting this Bill. Number one is that, EDTPA reduces the

student teaching experience, it prevents them from fully experiencing student teaching, participating in all elements of student teaching, participating in meetings, and attending to their students' needs, because they have to prepare a stage portfolio with videotaping, and all of that, that takes a lot of their time, and they know that if they don't pass it, they fail student teach. So, it really reduces their experience.

I actually, personally did a survey of student teachers in Central Connecticut State University and their response was overwhelming, opposing to EDTPA, I'll be happy to give you more information about the survey. Number two is, I'm glad that this Committee is supporting recruitment and retention of minority students, the SB 1034. Unfortunately, 10A, allowing EDTPA to continue will go counterproductive, will just actually discriminate against students of color, as well as bilingual and poor students because--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Aram, you're at two minutes 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing. Thank you.

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Yes. So I'll be glad to give you more information on that. Another reason why I am supporting this Bill that edTPA lacks validity and reliability and I will-- glad to give you information on that. And finally, edTPA reduces teacher preparation quality, it narrows the teacher preparation curriculum, de-professionalizes teacher educators. So, this is in In brief, and be glad to entertain any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, professor. Any questions or any questions for the Professor?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I have a couple of questions. So professor, thank you for sharing your testimony today. And I would like you to, if you don't mind,

send to the Ed Committee, the survey, samples of the survey, and also any other information pertaining to edTPA. But I know that you have talked to numerous students in the past and many of them were students of color that were basically saying that this was a detriment to them moving forward. I asked earlier, Pearson, if they had a number in regards to how many students of color have been through edTPA and how many have not, and they could not give me that answer, they said they would get back to me. So, do you have-- and I know that you had invited me about a year and a half ago to CCSU, where you invited someone from, I believe, Utah or Colorado to come in and talk--

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Sam, Rutgers.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): From Rutgers, oh, from Rutgers, okay, to talk specifically about edTPA, and how it was a detriment and, well, really wasn't helpful. Can you just tell me real quickly, right now at CCSU, how many students of color are in a teacher preparation program? And how many have either failed edTPA or are presently going through it?

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Thank you for the question. Actually, since I'm a professor, not an administrator like a Dean, so I don't-- I'm not privileged to that information.

I'm sure the CCSU can provide you that information. But I can tell you that, in a survey, that also in another study that UConn did, the University of Connecticut did a wide paper and found the same results, that students of color felt that they don't have the same access to their teacher preparation, with edTPA sitting and determining a lot of the curriculum, and also the cost of the money and the anxiety over the high stake testing.

All of that was really discouraging them from succeeding and going into the teaching field, in

fact, Representative Sanchez, you were sitting there in last year presentation and they were about three, I believe, three women of color that were teachers, and they shared with us how edTPA provided yet another barrier, and they were able to overcome it by, sometimes, circumventing, actually, the edTPA.

We know that one of the side results of high stakes testing is cheating, and a-- unfortunately, with edTPA is very easy to stage your own video, and then uploaded it and plus there are quite a few websites that help you put the portfolio together and then you send it to an anonymous reviewer in Pearson.

This is in contrast to supervisor of student teachers, who are supervising you, coming to visit you every two weeks, watching you day in and day out in your teaching. So, in a way, edTPA works counterproductive, counter to SB 1034, and counter to a quality teacher education. And putting yet another barrier, I think one previous speaker mentioned that praxis and others tests are a barrier for HBC colleges, for people of color who want to be teachers. So, it's not just this test, but it's also praxis on top of it.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you for that. So I'm looking forward for you to share that information so I can share also with Committee Members. Are there any other-- Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes. So, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And if I may, just to Professor Ayalon, do you know how many states have implemented this type of assessment? And the second-- I know I went through the report, and I think one of the areas that I'd also be interested in is portability. Once you go through this program, it's recognized in other states, and if you could just comment about that piece of the report, I would appreciate it.

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Yes. I think things have changed since the last year report, the-- Georgia, which had edTPA, for I believe, at least seven or eight years, one of the first states has abolished it, because it experienced a shortage of teachers, especially teachers of color, and so they abolished edTPA.

In the northeast, we're the only one, other states examined it and decided it was counterproductive. And Massachusetts has a great alternative, I urge the state of-- our Education Department to look at what Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, all of them rejected after examining, taking a serious examination of edTPA.

Other states are looking that the data is coming more and more how edTPA is counterproductive, is not increasing the quality of our teacher preparation, in fact, it's decreasing it. And if you think of it, logically, it's-- we have a private corporation, whose data is not public information. So when Representative Sanchez asked for data, it's kept secret. They don't offer that, there is no public scrutiny of what edTPA does. Let me give you an example from-- edTPA claims that there is an advisory board of experts in measurement that approves edTPA, and it turns out that it's false. None of the people that are mentioned in the advisory board actually, endorse edTPA.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you for those remarks.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Any other questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Professor, and thank you for your testimony today.

PROF. ARAM AYALON: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have-- I don't see Catherine. I don't see Catherine up here, it's

Shelley Davis. I don't see her. So I guess next is Shannon Marimon, and then after Shannon is Kate Conetta. Hi, Shannon.

SHANNON MARIMON: Hello, how you doing?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Good.

SHANNON MARIMON: Good evening.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You have the floor.

SHANNON MARIMON: Thank you. So, Chairman McCrory and Sanchez, and Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel, Honorable Members of the Education Committee, my name is Shannon Marimon and I'm the executive director of ReadyCT and the proud mother of two early readers.

At ReadyCT we advocate for academic excellence in career-connected learning for all public school students, including investments in our foundational childcare and educational systems. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 6620, the right to read, and opportunity and equity-- opportunity gap and equity Bill. There are reasons to enact 6620 that span individual impact to our youngest learners, to whom we have made a promise of a quality education, all the way to employers of every size, for whom we must prepare a qualified workforce if we want them to remain in the state, not to mention the citizens of Connecticut who are entrusting you to invest their dollars in public education in ways that have the largest return for all stakeholders.

Within my written testimony, I provide a number of striking data points relative to K12 literacy in Connecticut. And these results bear out in the longer term as demonstrated by high remediation rates among students enrolled in our state community colleges and universities. True equity and education begins with good phonics instruction in

the earliest grades. If you set students up with success for literacy, you provide them with the best chance they have to build their knowledge and skills and reach their full potential. If denied this right, struggling readers have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and behavioral challenges, and are more likely to disengage and disconnect from school. If the moral imperative connected to teaching our kids to read isn't enough, consider the economic impact. The cost of illiteracy to the US in economic terms is just over \$300 Billion a year.

Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. Given the high stakes of early literacy, I want to shift focus, towards a focus on how we might think about implementation.

Setting students up for reading success does not rest on just one thing, it requires a systemic approach. 6620 stands up a dedicated literacy center, which can ensure we have the right expertise and the right literacy preparation and PD to best equip our teacher candidates and in-service teachers to provide high-quality instruction. This leadership is long overdue and necessary to ensure the goals of the Bill are met.

In addition to leadership and capacity, a coherent, statewide approach to early literacy will require adequate funding. Connecticut is incredibly understaffed and under-resourced when it comes to literacy. So we ask for adequate funding for implementation of this Bill to be a success. While there will always be competing interests, now is the time to address this need head-on, especially as complemented by the COVID relief funds. In reviewing the opposition to this Bill it's evident that some districts are concerned about---

CLERK: Sorry for interruption, you're at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

SHANNON MARIMON: Districts are concerned being denying freedom and flexibility to use materials and programs they deem best practice. Unfortunately, far too many Connecticut districts are not applying and integrating scientifically-based approaches to reading instruction.

Connecticut has taken the lead in following the science with respect to COVID-19 and the results have borne out. As with the pandemic, education should not be driven by politics, it should be guided by science, especially when that scientific base is extensive and well established. There are a few things we know for certain in education, but one of them is we know how students best learn to read, and it's pure negligence not to make this form of instruction uniformly available to all students here in Connecticut. Time and again, we sweep this issue under the rug, knowing full well that the same system fails tens of thousands of students year after year. We can and must do better. And then I did submit written testimony on Bills, 1033, 1034 and 1035, and happy to answer questions or talk about any of those.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Shannon, thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have Representative Haines.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Representative Haines.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Shannon, for being here today. I do have a question in regards to the obstacles or barriers in regards to literacy, it sounds like you would be a good expert in the area. What ultimately gets in the way of kids learning to read? And the center

that we're talking about or this office we're talking about, is there-- is part of the charge to face those barriers?

SHANNON MARIMON: Definitely. Yes, I mean, I think the number one thing that the Bill addresses is, in emphasizing the strong science base, the science of reading, which has been proven and bears out time and time again.

There's been a lot of, kind of-- new wisdom has arrived over the past year, that of reporting and research that is putting forward the need to emphasize, at least at the foundational level, phonics development, as well as vocabulary development. But it's just-- it's knowing the tools in the toolbox, the teachers need to be-- need to have in order to be set up for success and to work with students effectively in order to build that foundational skill. Decoding words doesn't come naturally, it's hard work and students need the support. Some students will learn more quickly than others, but others will need more investment of time and support.

And oftentimes, we're finding out that, to no fault of the teachers, they just haven't been adequately supported and prepared in the science of reading through their educator preparation programs, or once they get into their school systems, their curriculum and the programs and materials that are the foundation of the early readers-- reading programs are not aligned with the science of reading.

And so we want to make sure that that, first and foremost, is kind of addressed at a universal level. And then I think beyond that, it's just ongoing support, coaching, and development for educators, both pre-service and in-service, and sustained. It's got to be sustained and explicit support that continues and we don't have, kind of, a cliff at a certain point, where we just stop doing-- providing that support, because literacy is, it is the most

critical thing we could be investing in with education.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you. Thank you for your answer. Is there also any kind of learning disabilities that folks in the early literacy programs can align themselves with or indicate in certain students that they're having any problems because of this particular thing? And will they be able to address it with this group as well?

SHANNON MARIMON: Most definitely. I mean, the special education is a priority as well, in terms of-- what is oftentimes good for students that are struggling readers, is good for all students, and so students at the kind of level of tier three intervention level, needing that additional support, those are practices that would also be equally applied to students for whom it comes more easily or more naturally. But I think the idea that making that uniform, so we're not guessing, it's not a guessing game, every student is being provided with the same adequate amount of support and instruction that is grounded and aligned in the science of reading.

REP. HAINES (34TH): And also-- and I'm sorry, I'm just trying to pinpoint down different things that could possibly be diagnosed as disabilities in learning to read, dyslexia is something that comes to mind. I don't know if there are others, but in this group that we're looking to fund in this Bill, can that be integrated in that, or is that a specialty outside of that?

SHANNON MARIMON: No, in fact, we-- so there's a, the Right to Read Coalition, a number of other representatives of that group have already testified today and are going to testify after me.

And the conversations we've had with the dyslexia advocates, and knowing that, even the testimony that we submitted as a coalition last week, to language

that was put forward to the Higher Education Committee, is to say that what is good for supporting students with dyslexia, is good for all students. And so let's make sure we're doing something that's comprehensive, and it's not viewed as like the one-off over here, it's a systemic approach. It'll also set us up for success as a state when we're looking for grant funding opportunities, because we'll look like we really have a coordinated aligned effort happening in our state, and there'll be confidence in making investments in us to keep building on that effort.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you for that. And I'm also on Higher Ed and we do have that dyslexia Bill that we're trying to figure out, we've been told by SDE that they don't have the capacity to address it, yet it sounds like this is addressing it.

SHANNON MARIMON: If the funding and the resources follow it, I think that that's the key point I want to emphasize, is that we can't short circuit this, we have to make sure we set it up for success, and this idea of a center, a comprehensive center, with support that can be provided to all districts across the state and a hub that you know you can go to for that expertise for all learners, including students with special needs, that that will be a adequately funded resource so that it can be successful. Right now it's just almost shameful how little capacity we have at the state level for literacy, we basically have one education consultant, and a literacy director who is spread across other efforts as well. So we really need to make that investment.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Well, and I absolutely, 100% agree with you, Shannon, thank you so much. I'm sure that you're aware of the Bill that I'm talking about over at Higher Ed, and we are changing the language and I know that Senator Osten is ready and is showing up to go to appropriations for the funding and resources necessary for this, because

this is really our foundation for education. If the kids can't read, they can't do anything else.

SHANNON MARIMON: Exactly.

REP. HAINES (34TH): And if we're lacking in this area, we are lacking as educators, period. So I appreciate your answers. And thank you for indulging me, Mr. Chair, thank you so much.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Nope.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

SHANNON MARIMON: Oh, just one side note that I just-- because one of our submissions was around the edTPA legislation, there is an edTPA fact sheet that I'm happy to forward, that has some of the data that you were talking about earlier. So I'm happy to forward that along.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Please do, thank you.

SHANNON MARIMON: Thank you all.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Kate Conetta.

KATE CONETTA: Good evening, everybody. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarty, and all the Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. Before I start, I do want to just congratulate Senator Miller on her recent election victory.

My name is Kate Conetta and I'm from Danbury. In full disclosure, I serve as the Vice Chair of the

Danbury Board of Education. But to be clear, I am not speaking on behalf of the Board. I'm here today as a private citizen, speaking in opposition to House Bill 6616, which would restructure the funding stream for charter schools and in support of Senate Bill 1034, to support minority teacher recruitment and retention.

While there is certainly a very vocal contingent from our community, which wants to bring a prospect charter school to Danbury, the majority of our residents do not want this. Our city has been fighting it for seven years and what has made that a possibility is the process of being able to reach out to our legislators and for our legislators, in turn, to have a voice within the full assembly to say, "Our constituents do not support this particular school coming into the community."

If this mechanism is replaced through the passing of HB 6616, there would literally be no way for me or any other resident of Danbury to address the legislature about a school-like prospect coming into our community. I did submit written testimony which gets into some of the specifics as to why this particular school is not a good fit, but quickly I would point out to you, that prospect does not have the experience or the specialized training to work with our EL students, which constitute 25% of our student body, nor would it have the resources to support our special education students, which approach one out of every eight students in the district.

I'm a proud supporter of Danbury public schools, they're the cornerstone of building equity into our system. A free, quality public education is exactly the kind of access every student in our state should have. The challenge we face is in fully funding them, and I imagine some of you were as disappointed as I was at the possibility of the ECS funding being frozen.

I looked to the state legislature to partner on the mutual goal of fully funding our public schools in ways such as the flexibility of Alliance spending proposed in HB 6618, or a speeding up of the ECS formula proposed by SB 948. I also at this time want to voice my support for SB 1034, which supports minority teacher recruitment and retention, and which is also mentioned in HB 6618. While we already have developed a program at Danbury high school which promotes teaching as a career path in order to cultivate more teachers who represent the diversity of our community, it would be truly wonderful--

CLERK: Excuse me, you're at two minutes, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

KATE CONETTA: Thank you. It would be truly wonderful to have more support for this mission. Our students need to see teachers and leaders who look like them and the legislature has an opportunity here to build subsidies in to make this a reality for financially-strapped districts. We should be supporting every step we can towards equity. Again, thank you for your time and for your work in supporting education and constituent voices.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No question. No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Seeing none, we'll move on.

KATE CONETTA: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Kate.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So next we have, Norman Sondheimer, and then after that, Chelsea Gazillo. Mr. Norman.

NORMAN SOUNDHEIMER: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There you are Norman.

NORMAN SOUNDHEIMER: There I am. Thank you, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, Distinguished Members. I'm Norman Sondheimer from Avon and a member of the State Department of Education Computer Science Advisory Board.

I'm both here to speak in favor of the computer science Section of Bill 1033, but more to the point, I'm attempting to correct an ambiguity problem in the Bill that I helped create. I supported Senator Witkos and Senator Maroney's development of the Bill, was their contact to the SD computer science community. They all wanted to assure that a student taking a rigorous computer science course could get to use it as a STEM high school graduation credit. SD has no regulations to assure that, worse, the US Department of Education and others often treat computer science, and STEM as separate.

20 states have already moved to, explicitly move to allow computer science to count. So, the Senators and our SD contacts all like the language in the Bill, but there's a real problem that you can see in the written testimony. The only two that oppose the Bill, give it a very different reading.

So if you have the text handy, take a look at that one relevant phrase. It says, nine credits in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including computer science. How many of you think that requires a student to take a course in computer science? Yep, I guess that some of you do. I've heard the question from earlier, Kate said it's ambiguous. That's not what the Senators intended. There are two ways out, first, you could make computer science the fifth item in the list, so it would end, 'Mathematics and Computer Science,' not including computer science.

But that says that STEM and computer science are separate in Connecticut. And STEM appears elsewhere in our laws and regulations, that would not be good. A second alternative is you could make a simple statement in Connecticut law, essentially what's in that Bill, so it would be, so quote, "For purposes of education--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Norman, you are at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

NORMAN SOUNDHEIMER: "For purposes of education, science, technology, engineering and mathematics includes computer science," end quote. So that avoids future confusion, maintains the simplicity of the graduation requirements. I hope that's clear, and I hope you pick one of the two options. My apologies for starting the confusion, or being a part of it. Thank you for continued support for computer science education.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Thank you, Norman. I'm sure we can work on that language as we move the Bill forward. Any questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): There are no questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

NORMAN SOUNDHEIMER: Thank you so much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Chelsea Gazillo, and then after that, followed by Jim Williams.

CHELSEA GAZILLO: Thank you. Co-Chair, Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Ranking Member Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarty, and esteemed Members of the Education Committee, my name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I'm an American Farmland Trust New England Policy Manager.

In Connecticut I direct the Working Lands Alliance and I'm also a member of the Connecticut Farm-to-School collaborative. It's great to be here with you all this evening, and I'm here to testify in support of HB 6621, Section 3, that if passed would fund a Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program. As an alliance, WLA cares deeply about saving the state's working farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's residents.

Connecticut's agricultural industry has a \$5.2 Billion impact on the state's economy and supports over 29,000 jobs. Connecticut's public schools are major food buyers and according to a October 2020 Feeding America report, it is estimated that between 24-30% of Connecticut's children are food insecure. HB 6621 will change food purchasing and education practices at schools and early childcare centers to inspire Connecticut kids to learn more about how and where their food is produced, as many of my colleagues have mentioned to you earlier today.

In 2020, WLA was proud to participate on the Governor's Council on climate change, working in natural lands, Ag, and soils Working Group. One of our Subcommittee's recommendations was to increase the amount of Farm to School opportunities in the state. This will help reduce the amount of miles our food travels from farm to plate and thus help reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions. The report is hyperlinked in our written testimony.

A Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Grant Program will also create more local markets for Connecticut agricultural producers, including new and beginning farmers, as my colleague Jiff Martin mentioned, according to a 2017 report released by the National Young Farmers Coalition, emerging farmers rely heavily on a single crop, predominantly vegetables as their highest revenue. And although young farmers are diversifying their operations, many

still depend on a single enterprise to pay the Bills that could include a contract with a local school district. This can be done through what my colleague mentioned earlier, as a micro-purchase tool that would enable school districts to purchase a single crop from a small farmer. This legislation is the first step in strengthening the connection between our education sector and the state's agricultural sector. We strongly urge the Connecticut General Assembly to pass this important provision in this session--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, you're at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

CHELSEA GAZILLO: Okay, great. We hope that you will refer to WLA's testimony and the testimony of American Farmland Trust who have led the Farm-to-school efforts in New York State for more information. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No, no hands are up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay. Thank you again.

CHELSEA GAZILLO: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Jim Williams.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Jim Williams is next.

JIM WILLIAMS: Yes. Hello, my name is Jim Williams, I'm the Government Relations Director for American Heart Association. I would like to thank the leadership and the Members of the Education Committee for an opportunity to speak in favor of House Bill 6617, specifically Section 2, Subsection 6, and to request an amendment that will ensure that there are minimal standards to follow with regards

to the placement of these water bottle filling stations.

Specifically, the amendment that we request would state that, there must be at least one water bottle filling station per 100 students, and at least one water bottle filling station on each floor or wing of the building, and at least one water bottle filling And all food service areas. I feel that with the requested amended language that this will be a much stronger Bill for which we'll be enthusiastically supportive.

Why water bottle filling stations now? The problem is accessing drinking water in school during the current COVID-19 pandemic is difficult at best. As a tradition, water fountains are typically the largest collector of germs in a school, and most are turned off due to fears of spreading those germs. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control now encourages staff and students to bring their own water to minimize use and touching up traditional water fountains. Touchless water bottle, filling stations solves this problem and will ensure that kids will have access to clean drinking water at no charge while in school. The cost of these stations is nominal in the process of construction and could save dollars over time.

I believe that with the previously mentioned amendment, that this Bill would be deserving of your boat-- of your vote. I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions now or at any time in the future.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And so, I just want to-- quick question, the water bottle filling stations, would they be controlled remotely by just putting the cup underneath and the water flowing or using your foot to step on something in order to get the water?

JIM WILLIAMS: Most of the filling stations that I'm familiar with work with a sensor, so when the water bottle is placed in the appropriate area, it dispenses to water.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Okay. Okay, thank you.

JIM WILLIAMS: You're welcome. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Next up.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Roja Yousuf. And then after that, we have Darci Burns.

ROJA YOUSUF: Hello, Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee. I have special greetings to Senator Miller and Representative Fiorello, who represent our allies in Stanford, and Senator Flexer, with whom we have worked with in the past. My name is Roja Yousuf and I'm a member of , To Student Activism, and organizations are fine in High School in Norwalk.

I'm testifying on behalf of those groups and our sister program at Stanford High School. I'm testifying in support of HB 1034, which is about minority teacher recruitment and retention. I'll summarize our written testimony. We just finished celebrating Black History Month at my school, but this testimony in this Bill are about Black futures, and the future of my Hispanic and indigenous, and Asian classmates and those will follow in our footsteps.

Our public awareness campaign about minority teacher hiring dates to May 2020, which is when we included teacher hiring in a 14 point plan. We submitted to our district superintendents about equity and education. Our campaign, which educates students about the issue, was prompted by this, Norwalk's 11,500 students, 75-- 71% are Black, Hispanic, or Asian, while just merely 17% of our teachers are.

We share these studies with students, including one that found that having just one Black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade, reduced low-income Black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39%. But it's the voices of students that keep our campaign going. Every month since September 2020 we've hosted a podcast, one show examined racism another looked at the lack of Black male students as leaders.

Students talk about the role of racial passing in schools, some talk about their parents intentionally giving them what they considered Caucasian sounding names, so as to gain favor with their teachers, others talked about academic tracking students which start in middle school.

However, it's the voices of seven boys that captured everyone's attention. They talked about not having teachers their color to look up to, detentions and out-of-school suspensions based on color of their skin, not meeting with their guidance counselors because they would not get my life, my pain, they talked about wanting to be understood. We applaud the State Department of Education and its partners, whose steps they have been taking to increase the number of educators of color by 10% by 2021.

The passage of HB 1034 will help maintain the higher minority teachers, whose skin color gives them the ability to see minority students in a way that's untarnished by stereotypes, biases and cultural disconnects that fuel inequality and injustice. Also, we support the creation of video training model, which is consistent with our call to have our school districts train staff and implicit bias in anti-racism when hiring. Finally, suggest that the state look at efforts undertaken by local school districts to increase minority teacher hiring, including the partnership between Danbury school district and Western Connecticut State University. We encourage you to pass House Bill 1034. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Roja, you did an outstanding job. Outstanding job, thanks for sending the message and representing your colleagues, your friends, your classmates down there. They should be very proud of you, the message definitely came over through-- in our ears. Any questions from the Committee? Seeing none--

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any, no. Thank you.

ROJA YOUSUF: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you again, Roja.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have-- I don't see Valerie on here, Bryan, so, Darci Burns, followed by Dr. Werblow.

DR. DARCI BURNS: Hi, thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB number 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. My name is Dr. Darci Burns, and I'm the executive director of HILL for Literacy.

We're a nonprofit organization that partners with state department school districts to implement multi-tiered systems of support, aimed at improving reading outcomes. We implement these models in response to federal mandates around school systems putting in place response to intervention and academic supports, to support teachers. However, in our experience, we have found that districts and schools tend to underestimate the extensive work and planning it takes to implement a comprehensive MTSS model that meets the needs of all students.

And often schools lack the systems and maintenance structures in order to implement an effective model. MTSS is one of the most commonly described

prevention frameworks that incorporates evidence-based assessments and a continuum of evidence-based practices that yield important improvement outcomes for all students. Currently, in Connecticut, we have K3 Literacy initiative, that is an example of how to effectively establish and sustain an MTSS model of instruction for the highest-need schools and districts.

We have found that the funding and the support that's already been allocated for the Connecticut K3 Literacy initiative as a mechanism for working with samples, it started in five schools, is now around 70 schools across Connecticut. The proposed Bill will enable the current work partners, in collaboration with the various state agencies, to create a sustainable literacy standard anchored in current research. The Center for Literacy Research or Reading in Success will serve as it could serve as a permanent technical assistance training center to reach all districts across the state. So again, I just want to vocalize my support for this Bill and the promise that it holds for improving literacy outcomes for all students across Connecticut. Thank you very much, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hi, Darci.

DR. DARCI BURNS: Hi.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): I want to thank you for the work that you and your agency has done around literacy on the state in the TK 3LI would not be a success if it wasn't for you and Margaret Gillis in Literacy How. So I have a question, there seems to be concern about comprehension and English-learning

students and that this Bill would negatively impact their ability for students to comprehend. Do you have any thoughts on that?

DR. DARCI BURNS: Yes. So, the intention of the work-- so the work that we're doing across the schools currently is the majority of the students are-- many of them are second language learners, and then also, obviously, the ultimate goal of what we're trying to do in schools is to improve reading comprehension, to increase a love for reading, right?

But reading comprehension is dependent on the ability to actually read the words, right? So, it is really about doing both, right? It's about teaching kids how to read and to be able to access print and lift it off the page, but also simultaneously build background knowledge, build vocabulary, teach the comprehension strategies and skills that are required to read and access complex text, teach academic language that's required to be able to read content area text. So it's not one or the other, it's both. And to do both, you have to do both really well. And in our experience, really effective instruction, anchored in science, works for all students, regardless of whether English is their first language, regardless of the home they come from, regardless, right? I mean, that's the aim of this, is to have high expectations, teach all kids to read so that they can have success later on academically. I hope that's helpful.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you.

DR. DARCI BURNS: Yeah.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Yes, that was very, very thorough answer, thank you. And thank you, Mr. Chair for indulging me.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

DR. DARCI BURNS: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions. So, thank you for your testimony. Next we have Dr. Werblow and then after him is, Jennifer Jacobsen.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Okay. Representative Sanchez, and McCrory, thank you both for being here, you are like champions of the day. I've been on and off all day, I can't believe you both are still functioning. So, it's an incredible feat of stamina.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): It comes with the job

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: And itself is amazing. So I'll keep my time short, I'm really honored to just have a moment to have a voice. I'd like to speak specifically about SB 1035, edTPA, and I'm so thankful, Representative Sanchez, that I can support this Bill.

So often, I'm writing or I'm coming to-- trying to testify, and I'm often against something and it's so defeating to always be against something that's being proposed. So this is something that I'm so glad to see that it's provided. And I'm teaching, actually, right now, my students, they're actually right here on online, they can all wave to you. So these are our future teachers. And so one--two things I just want to make, there's so much pressure, the state has so much invested in this and it's going to be difficult to convince the state to do something different than what they have--that they have already mandated.

However, I think the argument of cost is really important. My students, as they were waiting for me to have the opportunity to testify, they went online and they calculated the total cost of required standardized test for certification in Connecticut,

and these are in addition to all of their coursework, student teaching, all of their tuition, this is not covered by tuition. And I'm looking at the list, physical education, roughly \$750, English cross-certification in English, \$1457, math could be 700-1000. And I want to say that one of my former Students grew up in Hartford, originally born in Puerto Rico, he came through the Hartford public school system, he's now an administrator at one of the Hartford public schools. It took him six attempts to pass praxis--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt you, you are at two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Sure. Six attempts to pass praxis 2. And I've mentored him, we worked, we've meditated, we visualized, and so one of these, just simply one of these assessments can be-- can end the career of any of our students, especially, our students of color. And so, I really appreciate you giving serious thought to replacing edTPA. I did submit written testimony, which I think is important that talks about the literature, and I know Dr. Ayalon mentioned that. So I want to just concede the rest of my time, and I really appreciate you raising this Bill.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, doctor. And that's the issue I have, is that, you just mentioned that for them to get certified, they have to spend an additional 700, 1400, 800, it just makes no sense. And then they graduate with such a huge amount of debt, just so they can go back into the system and teach our kids, it's wrong, it's just totally wrong.

And instead of making it a little more easier for us to have more teachers of quality, we make it so much difficult. And that's my struggle, I can't understand why we continue down this path. It's the same thing we're doing with preschool teachers, on a

preschool level, we're just making it so difficult for them, yet we're not paying them. They're not compensated like they should be compensated.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Exactly.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So, is always an issue. If we want to do something about education, and we want to do something right, well, let's look at our teachers and let's support them, instead of making things more difficult. So that's always been my biggest gripe when it comes to this.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): But thank you, thank you so much. And I look forward to looking at your written testimony. And we do have a question from Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And just very quickly, welcome to the Education Committee. And so, I know we're trying to figure this out with edTPA, and we naturally want to recognize the amount of work that goes into it and teacher preparation, but we also want to be sure that we have the best-qualified teachers coming out of the program.

So that's where I have some difficulty trying to do an assessment to what this would-- what the replacement would be. If you look at Stanford University and the work that they've done with the experts throughout the country, in developing this performance and evidence-based assessment, it seems like the majority of the experts are favorable to it. So, I'm trying and rarely do I do leadership, and we don't always agree, but we'll get through this one. But I'm trying to understand, truly, what this would be replaced with? And is there some way that we could look at the edTPA and find some compromise? In what this assessment already? Are there any ways to look at the different components

of the tool and see if there's a way that we can work with it?

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Well, thank you, Representative. That's a really good question. I think there's two pieces to the answer.

So one, when the experts from Stanford from SCALE, when they talk about edTPA as valid and reliable, for me as a scholar, I look at the peer-reviewed research, because a peer-reviewed literature means that a blind reviewer is looking at that, someone who's unbiased and that has to be published in a quality journal. So there's a range of journals, some folks can buy their way and publish their work. When I have asked for years, when I've asked the state to show me the evidence that they've made this decision, they've handed me, time, and time again, documents that are produced and published by SCALE, which is the subsidiary from Stanford. So that's totally unethical, in my opinion. Is not to say that they should have no research but there is no peer-review-- If you look at the testimony, I've summarized all of the peer-reviewed research on edTPA, and there's only 4 out of 36 published research that is supportive of edTPA, and three of the four are manuscripts, the authors disclose financial ties to Pearson, or to SCALE.

So, I mean, essentially, the only people that champion edTPA are the individuals who are paid consultants. And I've been a paid consultant in education at times so I've been on that side, but in this case, I'm not and I can speak openly. And the other piece that I want to say is, when someone says valid and reliable and you hear from a testing company executive, they are almost only referring to the measurements, right?

The reliability of the measure, and yes, that is important, but valid and reliability also has to do with the consequential, we call it consequential validity, is what academics call it. And that's,

how does that affect the well-being of our students. And if it's stressful, if it's causing stress, I've had students tell me in the hallway on a Saturday morning, an art student, telling me, Professor Werblow, if the edTPA is what you all of you want, I don't want to be a teacher. She was one of my favorite students. So these are the individuals that are never asked, these are the individuals that are not surveyed. They're not being involved and they're the ones that have to go through this incredibly rigorous program. 30 years ago, teachers never went through what they have to do now.

They can't work during student teaching. So, I mean, the edTPA consultants never addressed that, students cannot work during student teaching, because they're in schools full time, they're volunteering their time and then we stop all of these extra assessments on top of them.

And the poison of all of it is that, when they graduate in Connecticut, they do the TEAM certification to become a cooperative teacher, and so they're essentially doing the edTPA twice. The Team is developed by us, state of Connecticut. If I had a magic wand, I would look at what Massachusetts has done and is doing, Massachusetts has what's called the MCAP and it's a version of edTPA, that's valid and reliable, and is locally grown. It happens within the triangle of student-teacher, cooperative-teacher, university-supervisor. It's not controversial, it's very much a quality assessment, and it works. And they've been doing this all along, where Connecticut has chosen a different path. And so, I'm so grateful for your question and I hope that we can make progress in this area.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yeah. And to just close out, would you be able to share some of that research that you've mentioned, a few minutes ago, with the Committee?

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Absolutely. So I have my testimony, and I will follow up with you, Senator McCarty, and I will send you information about the Massachusetts model as well. And I'm also happy to share with you the documents the state has shared with me that are clearly--they're produced by SCALE, and not saying that that should just be disregarded, but it's an obvious conflict of interest.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Okay.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: And if it's only SCALE saying this is valid and reliable, then that raises some questions.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Okay. Thank you very much, and good luck with your class.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. I'd like to get a copy of that too.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, doctor.

DR. JACOB WERBLOW: Thank you both. Thank you, Representative Sanchez.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): So next we have Jennifer, I think it's Jennifer Jacobsen, yeah.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Good evening, everyone, hi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: My name is Jennifer Jacobsen. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify before you this evening. I know it's been a long day, so I'll be quick. I'm testifying on SB 1033, the graduation requirements, and I know I might be a little bit confused now, based on that previous

testimony that the intent maybe for computer science wasn't to make it a requirement, but I'll just go on the title of the Bill as if they were.

In 2017 when you all enacted the new graduation requirements, you built in the necessary guardrails that you thought were important to maintain, however, built-in flexibility for students to increase their voice and choice in building multiple pathways in the areas as they worked towards graduation requirements and allowed them to delve deeper into those areas of interest that were important to them in either the academic arena or those vocational and career areas that we offer. This Bill flips that intent and goes back to requiring courses, which of course you can do, and I'm not here to speak to the importance of those areas, however, it makes a pivot on the same exact class, the class of 2023.

Districts are still implementing the necessary supports and staff for the requirements that were changed in 2017. The reality is that this class and the 2024s as well, I would add, next year won't be able to necessarily add these because for many of you, I am sure those classes have already been chosen for next year, which will really leave for the 23s only senior year.

Now, if seniors have left certain courses in their success plan and working with their counselors for senior year, these will become supplanting credits. If your district requires four years of math going forward, and three years of science, there is now no more room left in the STEM bucket for engineering or any other electives. So I'm just cautioning on the one credits of both of these credits on this current group of kids. Not to mention, I will just give you an example in my own district, and you can go up or down in size, we would need 10.4 FTE, 52 sections covering 1265 kids just for the 2023s to meet this requirement.

Now for the financial literacy, again, I'm not speaking to the importance of that, but I did check multiple programs of studies and that is a 0.5 class in most districts that you do offer. And not saying not to do that--

CLERK: Sorry for the interruption, you're at two and a half minutes if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

JENNIFER JACOBSEN: Okay. I would just say be cautious on these current classes, they've lost a lot. We are dealing with a lot of possible credit recovery as well. So we need to be careful with these classes right now as we all work towards what we're looking at and dealing with at this time. So, that's my testimony. I'm happy to take any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): We have our Representative Leeper.

REP. LEEPER (132ND): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hi, Miss Jacobsen, I just want to say thank you for being here. Having this be in effect for the class of 2023 was a concern I raised, maybe seven hours ago, hard to keep track at this point. But I think there's a lot of value to making sure our kids are prepared financially. But I think the turnaround for the class of 2023 might be a bit aggressive. So I appreciate your testimony, thank you for being here.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Jennifer. Next, we have-- I hope I'm saying this correctly, Monarae Chin, and then followed by, Fran Rabinowitz.

MONARAE CHIN: Good evening, everyone.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

MONARAE CHIN: Hi. Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Members of the Education Committee, I am Monarae Chin and I live in the town of Windsor, Connecticut. I am a substitute teacher and I'm testifying to ask for your support for Senate Bill Number 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

I believe in the public school system of America, my 11-year-old son is currently enrolled in one. I also believe the diverse student population of CREC schools reflect one that deserves a match in a diverse teaching population. There are many students teachers of color, like myself, who would love to be able to contribute to the classroom, but they are unable to do so due to financial constraints and additional college cost.

Not only is the Connecticut Teachers Residency Program aimed to eliminate those college costs, but it is designed to attract teachers of color by offering compensation throughout the training of the teaching process. In addition, the mentorship component of the program, it is second to none, and it serves to stand out when compared to other alternate teacher training programs. It is believed that when the alternative route is chosen, teachers are ill-prepared. However, to have mentors on board, as it is in this case, is a plus, as it helps to boost self-confidence throughout the 18 months and in the first year of teaching.

One Professor, Linda Darlene Hammond, who is professor emeritus at the Stanford University believes that having an increase in diverse teacher population in the classroom is important, and I share her view. She went on further to say that it is a strategy used for learning for students of color, and not only does White students benefit from learning from teachers of color, but the impact is especially significant for students of color, who are more likely to succeed as these teachers serve as a role model to support school and learning. So,

for Connecticut Teachers Residency Program to have taken on this racially diverse approach, it can only help in making our children of color better adults--

CLERK: Madam Monarae, you're at two minutes 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing. Thank you.

MONARAE CHIN: I believe to continue to have this program will aid in giving a boost to these children and their academic performances. There is no doubt that the teacher support that they get from this program can only have a ripple effect on the learning process for all children. So with that said, I hope you will support this program, and that the outcome from this hearing will be a favorable one in funding the program annually for four and a half million dollars. Thanks for listening, and thanks for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, Monarae Chin. So my question to you, do you-- are you looking to be a participant in one of these programs?

MONARAE CHIN: Yes, I have applied, I did my interview yesterday.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Great, great, I hope you do very well. I think it's an outstanding program and definitely looking for people like yourself.

MONARAE CHIN: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee? Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you again.

MONARAE CHIN: Thank you, too.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

MONARAE CHIN: Have a good day.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And good luck.

MONARAE CHIN: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have, Fran Rabinowitz.
Hi, Fran.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Good evening. Hello, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarty, and Members of the Education Committee. From one who has been tuning in and out of the Committee meeting since this morning, I applaud you and thank you for your patience and your ability to listen to some wonderful ideas. So, thank you very much for being there. I'm here, and I thank you for the opportunity. I'm here to testify on Raised Bill 6620, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN EQUITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS. I think I know most of you, but just in case, I'm Fran Rabinowitz and I'm the executive director for the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

So let me just start by saying, the ability to read is essential, and CAPSS fully, fully embraces the work this Bill seeks to accomplish. We do not, however, want a separate and parallel structure to the Connecticut State Department of Education. We feel that that creates another bureaucracy for districts to deal with and fragments expectations and services for our schools and our students. With the federal dollars now being made available, it's time for Connecticut to go big. With an early reading success platform that offers effective and ongoing training under the auspices of Commissioner Charlene Russell Tucker, who stands ready to take this on.

The department would now be able to hire the experts it deems appropriate to support this work. It should include a significant revision to the pre-service experience of teachers, who, I'm sorry to say, come from programs, not every program, but many programs woefully unprepared to teach reading, and I say that based on my experience as a teacher, administrator, and superintendent in Bridgeport. Efforts must be developed and to sustain to mitigate staff turnover, particularly in our urban areas. We welcome a council formation that reports and is--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Fran, you're at two minutes 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Okay, all right. CAPSS believes reading attainment is the pathway to success for all children, strongly impacts structural racism, and will demolish the prison pipeline that so many of our children's experience.

We look forward to working with the Connecticut State Department of Education to accelerate this important work on behalf of Connecticut's children. By the way, you will find those recommendations in our CAPSS blueprint. And finally, we applaud the outstanding work that CERT did on the development of the African American Latino Curriculum and we fully endorse them as the lead professional developers for this curriculum. Thank you so much for the opportunity, and I'll be happy to answer any questions or talk with any of you in the future about this, about reading, and I think you've heard me enough to know that I believe that's the foundation for our children to be successful, especially in our cities.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Fran. We do have a question from Senator Miller.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Hi, Fran, how are you?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: I'm fine, thank you, how are you?

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Good. Fran, thank you for the work that you've done and always being supportive of the literacy, the work that we've done around literacy. I guess this is more of a comment than anything else, so, the impetus for this Bill was that SDE or the state of Connecticut wasn't doing-- thinking big enough.

And so, we know that our children are lagging behind because of their inability to read. And so today, Commissioner Tucker agreed, or I should say, committed, to making sure that this center will be placed in SDE. So she wants to partner with us. So, thank you for saying that we need to think big, and that was the impetus of this, and we can no longer sit back and see our children fail. And when we have a city, a state like Mississippi, who took the bull by the horn, and enacted their literacy, I guess, I think is Literacy-Based Promotion ACT and they did, they invested in teacher preparation, they invested in intervention. And they were the only-- Mississippi was the only state that had some movement in the NAEP scores. So I want to thank you, and for your comments, it was definitely inspirational and motivational. So thank you.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you, Senator Miller. And I want to say one thing, when I was Associate Commissioner in the mid-early 2000s, around 2005, we had Reading First, it promoted the five components of literacy. People are still-- some people are still using that training today. We know what to do, we know what's right, and we just need to do it.

And I believe that Commissioner Russell Tucker will take this on, I believe there are dollars available and I think we should spare nothing in putting this forward and doing what needs to be done, because I do believe it's the major reason for discipline, it's the major reason for school dropouts, and it's-- what we see in prison are kids that started out

and couldn't read. And I-- so thank you, thank you for your work on this and we stand ready as superintendents to partner with Charlene, which we do all the time to help her with anything she needs to put forward. But this is close to our hearts, and I can't wait to get started.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Fran, so let's do this. Let's keep the ball rolling.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Yeah, we need to do it.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): All right, thank you.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: You're welcome.

SENATOR MILLER (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll go very quickly. Welcome, Superintendent Rabinowitz. So, just so I'm clear, that I know CAPSS supports this initiative, it was just the housing of the new center that was the concern right now, that SDE, as Senator Miller pointed out to us, is in full agreement CAPSS can endorse this, as we all know that this is probably one of the most important initiatives that we can do to make sure that all of our students are reading at grade level and succeeding because we know the-- how this impacts life for all of our students. So I just wanted to clear that up, that was your only original hesitation, is that correct?

FRAN RABINOWITZ: That was my only hesitation. I just did not want something separate and parallel, especially when I know Charlene so well and I know that she is 100% behind this and will help in any way. But it has to be big, it has to be well

thought out and the Committee-- the group that has brought this forward is already thought out much of it.

It is, honestly, like rereading the Reading First proposal and program that we had. I would say that we have a lot of work to do. It requires curriculum, it requires grade-level standards, it requires us to put those in pre-service and across the board for kindergarten through grade three. And we have to be relentless, and we've got to find a way to move it forward. Reading First fell apart because the funding went away, not because of anything else. And we were making real gains, and then the funding left and so did the reading achievement of our kids, we cannot let that happen.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Right. And I do believe-- sorry, Mr. Chairman, I promise I'm going to go real fast. But I do believe that there is truly a new sense and commitment to really getting this right throughout all of our districts in the state. And I want to recognize also, Senator Miller, if you'll permit me, Senator McCrory, because I didn't congratulate you yet and I wanted to thank you for all of your work. I know we've had many discussions in the past, so thank you, as well. And thank you, Superintendent Rabinowitz, I think we'll have to have more conversations on the edTPA going forward. So thank you very much.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: I'll be happy to have more conversations on that as well. Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Fran, I also want to thank you for all the work you've been doing, I think with

Senator Miller, yourself, and I, and so many of us who've been on this Committee for so many years, I'm sure we can find a happy medium with SDE, and working out where we can place the organization that we need to utilize to do the work that needs to get done, to make sure our children read on great level by third grade. You're absolutely right, we have to go big, we have to go big.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: We have to go big.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Yeah.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Our children should be reading by the end of grade one and reading fully, with comprehension, by the end of grade three. And anything less than that is unacceptable.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Absolutely. Thank you. Any other questions? Seeing none, we'll move on.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you all very much. Thank you for your work.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Fran.

FRAN RABINOWITZ: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next up is, Ryan Kennedy, and after Ryan Kennedy is Tom Nicholas.

RYAN KENNEDY: Hi, everybody. Thanks to everyone on the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak. My name is Ryan Kennedy, I'm from New London. I'm a chef for Brigaid, which is a company that puts chefs into institutional food spaces, mostly schools, to work with the existing staff.

They prepare fresh, nutritious, and often from scratch meals within the confines of federally funded programs like the National School Lunch Program. We've been working with new one in public schools since 2016. Representative Nolan was there

with us helping us out in the dish room in those very early days. But aside from New London, I personally had the privilege of working with and visiting schools in states like New York, Virginia, Colorado, South Carolina, Virginia-- I mean, and California.

I'm speaking in support for House Bill 6621, AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTE. Specifically Section 3, which is about establishing a CT-grown for CT kids Grant Program. This Bill is the first step and an incredibly important one. It's important because what five years of working in schools in New London has shown me firsthand that's just how valuable healthy local food and unique food educational experiences can be for students, especially those students who live in food deserts, or food swamps as many in CT do. When you see a student try our new foods, specifically a vegetable or a fruit for the first time, and you can connect that experience to a lesson or a school garden experience, or even better yet, a farmer it's incredible how impactful that can be at making students receptive to foods they otherwise would turn away from.

I was the chef at the high school in New London and there were kids in those schools who couldn't recognize a lot of the fruits and vegetables that we were serving in the most basic form. And again, it's-- like that's about exposure. As it stands now, the funding for school food nutrition provided by the USDA, dispersed through the state's Department of Ed is in many ways just insufficient to properly meet the needs of students.

That funding that does exist supports the efforts to combat hunger at the most foundational level, and any services beyond that often require philanthropic support. School food gets a bad rap, but it's critically underfunded in relation to the expectations that exist within society and within the context of a school. Our goals for school food,

in my estimation, should be to provide a model for what food-service nutrition and purchasing for students to emulate beyond the school. That's what schools are about, in general, they're about modeling appropriate behaviors and setting kids up for success in every way possible.

All of this is dependent on funding above and beyond the USDA reimbursement levels, it's just not enough. Money that comes in from the federal level into the state of Connecticut often leaves the state just as fast. Expanding funding and supportive things outlined in Section 3 would be huge. From my perspective, first of all as a chef--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Ryan, you are at two minutes 30 seconds if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

RYAN KENNEDY: Yes, no problem. As a chef in the space funding things like purchase of equipment, professional development, and skills training for school nutrition professionals would go a long way to addressing the issues built into the school food system. It's really, honestly the first step, and a much-needed investment in the health and well-being of students, as well as a push towards supporting and prioritizing our local food system and the folks that work within that system. Thank you a lot for the time, for the consideration, and, of course, if there's any questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony. I see one question, Representative Nolan.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. How are you doing Ryan?

RYAN KENNEDY: Pretty good.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Ryan, could you explain how different it's been since you've been able to-- since you've been to New London? Could you explain how different this will make the food change in the school system? I know, definitely, it's been night and day since you guys have arrived in New London. Struggling restaurant-type meals, could you just explain how-- the impact that this would change the food for our children?

RYAN KENNEDY: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, in general, in New London now, I mean, we're going through tens of thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables fresh-- since we've been in New London, there hasn't been one canned fruit that's been used in five years.

A kid in fifth grade in New London now has never seen a chicken patty or a chicken nugget or anything like that. So, just that's kind of like the highest level of it, and kids who-- just seeing kids palette change towards eating more kale, towards not having a palette that isn't somewhat in need of sodium, fat, or sugar to kind of make them feel satisfied, things like that. Having exposure to fruits and vegetables that go beyond simply like corn, potatoes, meats, and bread. A lot of food in schools is typically very grey and-- or brown, and in general, just having like a wide kind of palette of colors and of freshness is important.

And then, if you drive in New London on Coleman Street, there's nothing but fast-food chains and they have lines around the corner every single day, every single night. And we have, aside from just not a lot of economic opportunity, there are a lot of other diet-related sort of illnesses that plague this community and plague communities like this all around the state and, frankly, around the country, and undoing that begins in schools. But the funding that exists alone through the USDA and through the State Department of Education is not enough. We, thanks to foundational support, we were brought in

to New London through Grants Through Target and through the Rachael Ray Foundation, through more local foundations, things like that. There needs to be more funding. If we want to procure things locally, if we want there to be fresh fruits and vegetables, if we want training to happen in school so we can pivot away from this kind of process, teach, and serve model, in order for those things that happen or to have any chance, there needs to be additional funding. And frankly, the world kind of demands that of these school food professionals, and short of additional funding, it's an impossible hurdle for them to, sort of, tackle on their own.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): Appreciate that, Ryan. I just think that's it's so important to support this, because it actually has our children in our community saving their money, instead of going to the fast-food restaurants because they know they're going to go get a good meal at the school. So I just want to thank you, including props, because you guys do a wonderful job. And, thank you, Mr. Chair, for that, really important.

RYAN KENNEDY: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Nope, I think that's it. Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. Next we have, Maria Matos, and then after-- oh, wait a minute, hold on a second. No, we have, next is Tom Nicholas and then Maria Matos. Tom Nicholas is up next.

TOM NICHOLAS: Thank you, Representative Sanchez, and Good evening. And thank you very much, Senator McCrory, and Representative Sanchez. My name is Tom Nicholas, I'm the Vice President of the Connecticut

Education Association, and I'm here to testify on Senate Bill 34, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION on behalf of myself, and also the Connecticut Education Association. Increasing the diversity among our Connecticut teaching profession is crucial to the vitality, the excellence, and the success of all our schools. Having teachers of color improves the experience of all students, of all racial backgrounds. Some of the benefits of having teachers of color in front of our classrooms are the decreased dropout rates for students of color, as well as decreases in the disciplinary actions for students of color.

Additionally, having teachers of color increases the achievement for students of color, especially, if those students have had a teacher of color in front of them by the second grade. There's the additional benefit of the role model effect as well. I received a grant from the NEA to help establish future educators have diversity clubs, which was modeled after the West Hartford Club, that the wonderful teacher, Laura White established, and I hope to continue those programs.

I'm also interested to know the current count of certified Connecticut teachers of color who do not have a teaching job. I know like two years ago, the count was nearly 600 teachers of color who were certified but did not have a teaching job. And this signals to me, the implicit bias is a huge problem in our hiring and retention practices. CEA also supports innovative teacher preparation programs that attract more aspiring teachers of color into our public schools, particularly when it assists aspiring teachers to meet high standards of certification and to address persistent institutional and financial barriers. In 2017, the CEA entered into and began work with the CREC Administration to have such a program. Now these programs were designed, and--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Tom, you're at two minutes, 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing. Thank you.

TOM NICHOLAS: Great, thank you. So, that program, in particular, was designed and then helped-- facilitated through mentorship by teachers. So it would be great for us to continue working on innovative programs like that. I thank you all very much for your time and your efforts, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. No, I don't see any hands up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

TOM NICHOLAS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Nicholas. Oh, wait a minute, hold on. A hand did go up, it was Representative Exum.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you so much. I just wanted to say, Mr. Nicholas, thank you so much for your testimony, and I'm so glad that you did raise the future educators of color program that is underway in the West Hartford public schools.

I remember when that program began with Jamal Heinz over at Conard, and now with Laura White, and I think it is a wonderful example of being very intentional about growing a program, tapping into high schoolers, who would--who may not think of being educators, and then having that experience and exposure and kind of bringing that in. And one of the pieces that I think is exemplary of how this kind of works full-circle, is there's a partnership with Central, and then individuals who graduate from

there are guaranteed an interview with West Hartford public schools.

But you also raise a very important point, that even after you go through that process, if there isn't a real concentration and focus on the hiring piece, and making sure that there isn't bias in that area, you can have teachers who are certified, who still don't end up having positions, and then what is the issue there? We have to look at that. So I think you highlighted that well. And thank you for your support of this Bill, I think it's incredibly important. Thank you so much.

TOM NICHOLAS: Absolutely, and thank you. One of the benefits, I think, of a program like that is, you have dedicated teachers like Laura White, who help follow you through college as well, who helps you over the barriers of financial aid and testing, things like that. So, there's a lot more than just meets the eye in those kind of clubs.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Absolutely, absolutely. And it's wonderful, I must say, we have had some of those students come back into the district, and are now being hired in the classroom. So it is working, it's effective, but it needs to be much bigger, much broader. And so I'm really grateful to see this legislation before us. Thank you so much.

TOM NICHOLAS: Yeah. I know like earlier there was questions, like going to historically Black colleges and universities, and that's kind of one of the issues, is that we don't retain those students as much as our 'Grow Your Own' campaigns kind of do, because there isn't any connection or continuity for so many people.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Absolutely. And that's something to focus on. When we are able to recruit, in order to retain, but when you have more of a pool, it allows for that to happen. I think there needs to be-- it does take quite a bit to get individuals to

stay but going your own is also a wonderful way to go. So, I think we need to do both paths. Thank you.

TOM NICHOLAS: Thank you, Representative Exum.

REP. EXUM (19TH): Thank you, thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other questions. No other questions, thank you, Mr. Nicholas.

TOM NICHOLAS: Thank you very much.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we're going to, Maria Matos, and after Maria Matos is, Ushawnda Mitchell. Maria.

MARIA MATOS: Good evening. Hi.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Hi.

MARIA MATOS: Good evening, everyone. My name is Maria Matos, I'm a Danbury resident, a parent, and a member of LEAD, Latinas for Educational Advocacy and Diversity. I like to thank the Education Committee for the opportunity that has been given to us today to be here.

My entire life I have been fighting about bringing more educational opportunities and equity to our community. When I moved to Danbury, I immediately began working with various organizations to ensure that our Latino populations had access to resources and opportunities to get ahead. I joined the movement to bring a charter school to Danbury after

I saw, firsthand, the impact the lack of Latino teachers and the overcrowding of our school had on my own daughter. My daughter is a part of a school system where she barely had teachers and other administrator that look like her.

I know Latino professionals who work in other cities because they haven't been able to get hired in our public school system. I'm here to support the House Bill 6616 because I think it will finally be a fair system for the charters that have been approved and left in limbo and for future charters so that this situation we endure never happens again.

I like to see that this account set up for the commissioner is fully funded to deal with the immediate issue of our schools here in Danbury. I support the opening of Danbury Prospect because it does address those concerns of mine, including bringing more equity to our community. We have now been fighting for over thirty years to open a school that was already approved by the state board of education but have been left without funds-- without the funds he needs to be able to open everything single year after that.

It is my belief that is not fair to deny parents with lower or no economic power, the opportunity to choose where they would like their children to go to school. I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you to the Black and Puerto Rican caucus for listening to our voices and give us their support. I especially want to thank Representative Bobby Sanchez for coming to Danbury, meeting with us, and for giving us the opportunity to be truly represented. Thank you all for all your hard work and for embracing and reaching out to the needs of our community, you have made us feel that we are not alone and that you care. I thank you again for the opportunity to testify. If you have any questions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Maria, and thank you for coming in to testify today. And we'll see

how we move forward with this. I know there's going to be more discussions. We do have a question from Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. So nice to meet you, Mrs. Matos. I wanted to ask you, you've been fighting for years now and I can imagine each year is just so important to your child, as they grow so fast. But what are your options in Danbury now? Can you just help me understand that? And in the context of your continued fight for Danbury Prospect, what are your options right now?

MARIA MATOS: Right now, the higher school, the only higher school we have public is the Danbury High School. I mean, we have Immaculate, which is a Catholic school, and it's private. So that's why I said that is not fair for the people that don't have the economic power to go to law school. Also, we have the ABA tech, but it's so hard to get into ABA tech, and also, ABA tech is not only for Danbury students, it's also for other students from other communities and you have to really fight to get in there, is not-- It's an honorary and you have to really be ahead to be able to get in-- go in that school. So we don't have a lot of opportunities here.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Okay, thank you. And then, what difference do you expect Danbury Prospect will make? And also, I understand you have a different sort of district school that is looking to be built.

MARIA MATOS: Yeah, well, the difference that it's going to make is that first, is going to bring-- is going to make sure that is a diverse school, like not only for students, but for the staff. Is going to bring a lot of jobs to the community and is going to bring a bachelor-- international Bachelorette.

I mean, is it really-- I'm not saying that Danbury high school doesn't have a quality education, it does, but this one, the Danbury Prospect has an

international Bachelorette, like if you want to go to college in another country, you can just go because it's going to offer that. So, it's a really, really-- I mean, if we go to Brooklyn Prospect, we can see the quality of education that they have. So we're looking forward to open Danbury Prospect here in Danbury. And Danbury, even though it's a really big city, is the only city that doesn't have a charter school. We really need that. And I know that a lot of-- it's a lot being said, but it's only like a 10% solution. But even one person is important. If you can offer a solution for one person, I think it is important. So, by saying that it's only resolve 10% of the problem, you recognizing that it solves some problems. So, I think 10% is a really good number for-- to start off.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Representative. Thank you, Maria, thank you for taking your time and being here today to testify.

MARIA MATOS: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have, Ms. Mitchell, followed by-- we have, I think two more after that, I believe, Velazquez, and then, Sandra Ferreira.

USHAWNDA MITCHELL: Good evening, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION. My name is Ushawnda Mitchell and I am the Program Coordinator of the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program in partnership with the RESC Alliance.

Our alternate routes to elementary certification has been designed to address the many barriers that the state of Connecticut has faced when it comes to

diversifying its teaching staff. The program allows candidates to earn a salary with benefits while completing their year-long residency and are guaranteed a full-time teaching position upon successfully completing the program. High-quality teacher preparation is key to teacher retention. Our goal is to not only produce high-quality teachers, but we also have supports in place during their first three years of teaching and beyond, which are critical and allow for teachers of color to come together in a safe space to engage in professional development, share their experiences and best practices, and more importantly, continue to grow together.

We know it's not only important to recruit teachers of color, but we also want them-- to make sure that they stay. For the past two years, I've had the opportunity to work directly with two-- our first two cohorts. Cohort one is now in their first year of teaching, while Cohort two are completing their final few months of their residency and will be in their own classrooms this fall.

They are dedicated, flexible, and hardworking educators who have entered the field at a time like no other. As of September, this residency program will have put a total of 25 teachers of color in our classrooms over the course of two years. I had the chance to speak with Simone Douglas, who was in her first year of teaching after completing the program, and she shared the following with me, "I am often asked why I wanted to join the TRP family. The answer is simple, TRP is a uniquely designed program that took a risk on 12 individuals of color.

When I was completing my residency I instilled in my students the importance of taking risks. Taking risks is a starting point for change. History has taught us that without risk-takers, life remains the same. TRP took a risk and now we have more teachers of color in our classrooms. More teachers of color that represent the students we serve, more teachers

of color that bring a different perspective to educating the whole child. TRP believes in making change. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?"

As we move to expand the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program and partnership with the RESC Alliance across the state of Connecticut, from one site to four, I ask that you allocate \$4.5 million to support this program so that we can add an additional 60 teachers of color next year, which would mean that this program would have produced a total of 85 teachers of color over the course of three years. Thank you for your time and consideration.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Ms. Mitchell, and thank you for sharing those numbers. I'm so happy to hear that it's working. And we need to put more funds into it so that we can expand it, and I look forward to that happening this year. We do have a question from Representative Fiorello. Representative?

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much for your testimony, I just loved your comment about taking risk. Actually, today I was asked to make a comment about being Asian, given what happened in Georgia, and I was wondering, actually, is there any-- are there a bunch of Asian students in CREC? And are there need for Asian teachers? I'm sorry, I am just curious about that point. Thank you.

USHAWNDA MITCHELL: Yeah, so CREC is a diverse population, we actually have Asian teachers that have applied for the program, we were interviewing yesterday for the first round of interviews. And so, we are open to all people to accept them in our program. So, definitely.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thanks so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

USHAWNDA MITCHELL: You're welcome.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, and that's wonderful to hear. Thank you so much for your testimony today. Thank you.

USHAWNDA MITCHELL: All right, thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Next we have, I believe, Velazquez Ivelise. There you are.

IVELISE VELAZQUEZ: Yes.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): You're on.

IVELISE VELAZQUEZ: Good evening. Wonderful. Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that. Good evening, Honorable Members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about 6620. I am Ivelise Velazquez and I have served as an elementary teacher, a reading teacher, and a district leader. I have deep knowledge of reading racial inequities, educational leadership and have benefited firsthand from the partnership with the CT reading model, formerly known as CK3LI. While I value the overarching intent of the Bill, I believe it will miss its mark as written and offer several specific changes to the language in my full testimony.

First, let me say I am Puerto Rican and I'm fully invested in the struggle for equity and literacy in the state, and take every opportunity to engage my colleagues, principals, teachers, and students to desegregate data, to engage in the difficult conversations about race and equity, to raise critical consciousness about teaching and learning, and to embrace culturally relevant practices. I take a systemic approach to this work and want to partner with the CSDE, a true partnership in which the district's expertise about teaching and what students and families tell us is wrong with the system, at a local level, to be the central driver

for the change. This is work that deserves the support of CSDE and the legislature, but instead, proposed 6620, we create a new bureaucracy that would prescribe everything, from the curriculum programs we buy, the full battery of assessments we would use, and the schedule that we would keep to collect and analyze data, all of which are important, but not the area in which there is the greatest need. The, "Go big," lever that I love people are talking about that I want CSDE to work on is, culturally relevant practices, including pedagogy, budgeting, and hiring practices.

For example, in the state, while the percent of Latinx students is 27% and rising, Latinx credentials educators are at about 4% and stagnant. This disparity is an indicator of the need for better pedagogy and practice all along the pre-K 12 educational pipeline, as are the comments regarding Native people by previous speakers. Another concern is about the term, research base, that has been used by the supporters of this Bill, which is misleading. Currently, there are only two peer-reviewed studies about CK3LI, reviewing data for only four schools in the first two years of the project. No data on the impact on the other 70 schools listed in the project website has been published in a peer-reviewed study. But most importantly--

CLERK: Sorry to interrupt, Ivelise, you're at two minutes 30 seconds, if you wouldn't mind summarizing.

IVELISE VELAZQUEZ: But most importantly, those studies are not about creating a center to prescribe practice in each district. Please read the studies because their implication for practice is limited. I urge legislators to ask for more evidence and to recruit researchers of color to conduct, not only quantitative but qualitative studies, about how race, culture, and relationships influence the success of reading. In closing, I urge you to read my written testimony on ways the legislature, CSDE,

and districts can partner with districts to recognize how lived experience, racial and cultural context is every bit as important as the narrow instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics, or any other that proponents of the center want to prescribe. Thank you for your time, it's been a wonderful day, and I really appreciate your commitment to education. Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Miss Velazquez. Do we have any questions from Members? Okay, I don't see any questions, thank you for your testimony. Next we have, Sandra Ferreira.

SANDRA FERREIRA: Good evening, Honorable Members of the Education Committee. My name is Sandra Ferreira Molina, I am a Latina immigrant, a parent-leader graduate, a parent, and a member of Latinos for Educational Advocacy and Diversity in Danbury. My organization, along with thousands of parents in Danbury have been advocating for the opening of a charter school in Danbury for the past two years.

Let me be clear, charter schools are public schools, but we can be a-- it can be a better option than traditional public schools for some students. It is difficult to comprehend how a high-performing, diverse by design public school, a school that our community asked to open in Danbury can be fully approved by the State Department of Education but still fail to receive funding. We know charter schools, as referenced by our very own Secretary of Education, Cardona, produce numerous important benefits, such as expanded educational options for students, increased innovation by educators, improve student achievement, and healthy competitive pressure for traditional public schools.

We need to pass Bill House-- I'm sorry, House Bill 6616 to allow charter school funding to be simplified and easier for independent charter schools to navigate and succeed. Repeatedly, we have made the case for a charter school in Danbury

and continue to get told that the school isn't supported by the community.

Yet, we know our community wants an educational choice. Not everyone is fortunate enough to live in an area with top-notch traditional public schools. We are forcing parents to choose between struggling neighborhood schools and costly private schools. With the addition of charter schools, our parents have more choices, allowing them to choose the school that best meets their children's unique educational needs.

Each year the school isn't open, our district schools are becoming increasingly overcrowded, our community is missing out on Alliance district funding, given that Danbury is the only city in the state of Connecticut that does not receive this funding, and parents are losing faith in a system that feels like it is not specifically serving them or their needs. I am urging you to pass House Bill 6616, as well as include language that would allow previously approved charter schools, like Danbury Prospect to be covered by this law. In closing, we know that bringing a charter school to Danbury will serve our diverse student population and will give our parents choices we deserve to choose. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. Any questions?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Yeah, we have a question from Representative Fiorello.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mrs. Ferreira, so nice to meet you. And the Governor included more open choice seats, he does-- he gave more funding to open choice in Danbury and Norwalk. How do you feel about that solution for the children in Danbury?

SANDRA FERREIRA: It's not okay. Why would I want to ship my kid to another neighborhood where they wouldn't even have an option to create relationships with those neighborhood kids? If I move to a city, I want to make sure-- the likeliness of me moving into a city is because they have good schools, and therefore I want my kids to go to that school, and have options within that city.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Okay, okay. So, the Danbury Prospect will be a school in your neighborhood that your kids can walk to or have a short drive to?

SANDRA FERREIRA: So the Danbury Prospect School will be located in downtown Danbury because we do have a location for it. And so it would be a school-- it would be a neighborhood school, where children would be able to walk to it, correct.

REP. FIORELLO (149TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you. Any other questions from the Committee?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): I don't see any other questions. I mean, no other hands are up.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Okay.

SANDRA FERREIRA: Thank you.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): Thank you, Sandra.

SANDRA FERREIRA: Thank you.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Thank you for your testimony.

Do we have any-- Representative, Bobby, do we have any more people in the waiting room?

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): No other people in the waiting room. We are finished with testimony.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): We are done. Wow.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): And I'm going to be putting on-- I started off with my hat, and I'm going to end with my hat.

SENATOR MCCRORY (2ND): Great job, thank you guys. Thank you guys for persevering once again. Best Committee in Connecticut. Thank you for hanging in there with us. Thank you for listening to the concerns that our constituents have statewide, and I look forward to putting the force of legislation that we all can agree to, to help move our children and our families and Connecticut first. Thanks again. Louise is sending out information when we going to meet and we move forward from there. Thank you guys, you make great champions.

REP. SANCHEZ (25TH): This is our last public hearing, so it is officially adjourned. Thank you, everyone.