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Testimony: HB 6616

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before this committee. Thank you Chairman Bobby Sanchez for your tremendous dedication and support of the communities most in need.

I want to congratulate you and this committee for taking the time to listen to us. In Danbury our community has gone through one of the most painful and disappointing episodes in our city's history.

After decades of neglect by our elected officials the latino community in Danbury has been constantly condemned and made feel as if they are second class citizens. First by attacks of our immigrant community and then by a total disregard of our needs.

After so many years of being voiceless, after being disappointed and after being denied some of us began to organize. We decided that the system was just too large, too corrupt and it continuously kept us out.

We began to see how the few educators we produced we kept out. A system that is rigged against our immigrant community. Where we heard things like we hire "inhouse" in a house we were never allowed to come in. A house where the doors were locked to our community because of our last names and the color of our skin.

A city where the status quo is the norm and where a privileged few continue to perpetuate a system that is just plain racist. Our white elected officials continue to have a we know best for your community mentality and continue to put politics above the needs of our community. Officials who claim they care who claim they want what is best for our community but continuously shut the door in our faces.

We were tired of being ignored and having no real opportunities. So we decided to make our own. Our community began the arduous task of inviting one of the best charter schools operators in the country and after an arduous battle gained our charter. Then as our community rejoiced at the fact that our new school brought with it diversity by design where about 50% of the staff identify as teachers of color...when we rejoiced because this school had almost no achievement gap, As we rejoiced because this school brought a world recognized IB curriculum that would transform our students life...All of this literally exploded in our face with the election of Julie Kushner.

Teaming up with Bob Godfrey they decided that our community wasn't worthy of this type of school. They decided for us that no we didn't need it. They went out of their way to block our school.

We then decided to have a petition. We gained 4800 signatures and just gave up on that because no matter how many people wanted this school these two legislators didn't care. To them appeasing the union was more important than a disenfranchised community.

Our parents were disrespected at the capital when they took a day off from work and went to talk to our legislators. We felt helpless and embarrassed.

But then we realized that we were not alone. We had allies, we had legislators in Hartford that looked like us, we had legislators that were more than politicians, they were human beings that actually cared about the plight of our community. These legislators came down to us and gave us the respect we so desperately needed.

The BPRC came to our rescue, they listened, they cared. They told us we mattered. Today I am here to support HB-6616. It is a start to repair the horrendous injustice done to the black and brown community in Danbury. I want to ask this committee to ensure that this account has sufficient start up money so that it can take care of the characters already approved. To include wording that funds it or moves the 4.6 million about to expire from the charter school line item. But that this is not an empty account, that it is not a political ploy or a way to disrespect our community. We want it to be a permanent fix to a broken system. That also includes a non political formula for how this account gets funding. Please don't replace a broken unjust system for another but in good faith please help resolve the unfairness caused by the current charter school.

I believe in your leadership and I know that you will do what is best for our communities and regardless of politics will create a fair and transparent system.