

**Testimony of Melissa Jenkins, Ed.D.**  
**Executive Director of Early Childhood, Literacy, & PreK-6 Schools**  
**Bridgeport Public Schools**

In Support of H.B. No. 6620: 'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools.'

Before the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly  
Public Hearing | March 17, 2021

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 Melissa Jenkins and I live in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I am a teacher, administrator, professor, proponent of literacy for all, and a life-long learner.

I want to express my **strong support for H.B. No. 6620: 'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools.'** and urge you to vote in favor of this important legislation.

This legislation is important to me because I believe every student has the Right To Read, and there's a right way to teach them. I also believe teachers deserve the support to teach children through the science of reading. Teachers strive to create outstanding academic and social emotional outcomes for all children. Teachers in the primary grades of PreK-5 need the additional professional supports to create the most favorable outcomes for all children. In my professional experience, teacher who receive effective professional development create favorable outcomes for children, and when a team of teachers receive effective professional development, then the team of teachers are able to create exponential achievement outcomes for children across grade-levels.

As we know, Connecticut is facing an education and literacy crisis. Pre-pandemic, [nearly half](#) of Connecticut's third grade public school students were not meeting grade-level expectations in reading. Connecticut also has [wide gaps](#) in reading attainment by race, reflecting an ongoing civil rights injustice. The pandemic has further exacerbated this crisis, causing significant learning disruption and loss, as [recent studies](#) have shown.

We also know the stakes couldn't be higher. A student's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. It's also critical to addressing the opportunity gap and racial equity in our schools and society at-large. By the 3rd grade, students must transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Without those skills, the rest of the K-12 curriculum will not be fully accessible to them and they can fall increasingly behind. Further, we know today's education crisis is tomorrow's economic crisis, and CT faces significant challenges with workforce development and equitable employment opportunities. Poor reading skills are regularly linked to higher dropout rates, poverty and even incarceration.

I have observed children with limited reading skills struggle to feel good about who they are as a person due to the challenges with reading and with learn. No child needs to struggle with a sense of identity due to poor reading skills. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, said "Once you learn to read, then you are forever free." This bill will bring us one step closer to securing literacy freedom for every child.

This bill will help to change that by advancing a proven, statewide, comprehensive approach to effective and equitable literacy instruction for every classroom in Connecticut.

This legislation, if passed, promises to build on the success of Connecticut's homegrown, research-based model for reading instruction – formerly known as the Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK3LI) and now called the Connecticut Literacy Model – which utilizes the *science of reading*. Specifically, this legislation would: 1) Provide effective and equitable reading instruction in every classroom, 2) Address systemic racial injustice by closing the literacy opportunity gap and 3) Enhance CT's workforce development efforts, ensuring our students and state emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

My teachers and school district and every classroom in Connecticut stands to benefit greatly from this legislation. For these reasons, I ask that you vote in favor of H.B. No. 6620.

Thank you for your time and consideration.