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*Subira Gordon, ConnCAN  
Education Committee Public Hearing  
March 17, 2021  
Supporting Bills: SB1034, SB1033, HB6619, and HB6620*

### **In Support of SB1034, SB1033, HB6619, and HB6620**

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

Today, I am here to testify in support of: SB1034, SB1033, HB6619 and HB6620

### **SB1034**

#### **ConnCAN fully supports SB1034: An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention.**

ConnCAN is in full support of this year's version of AAC minority teacher recruitment and retention. For years we have been citing the science about why this matters and why now. In 2019 the state made a serious step to commit to certifying 250 new teachers of color. This year, the committee is connecting the state work with what needs to be addressed on the municipal level. Students need to have access to the profession at an early age, in a positive light so they too can decide that this is a career path with opportunities to make a difference in their own communities. A few years ago Senator McCrory shared a story about a young boy who said he did not want to return to the scene of the crime, meaning his school. That has 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. Becoming an educator is a great opportunity, a great pathway to the middle class and also a way to have impact on many lives. While this work can feel heavy and overwhelming, it is working. A few days ago Windsor voted to have its first black superintendent. Dr. Hill is an example of why this work matters, Dr. Rufkin in Waterbury, Dr. Connors in Middletown and Dr. Estrella in Norwalk.

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 a student can become, she also wrote that when the light hits a 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 ethnic gives them 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. By giving all human resources professionals access to implicit bias training at no cost, school districts can start to address some of the barriers that exist within the system itself that have not allowed for greater diversity. Dr. Hill wrote about the 'fit' stating that many times people of color are overlooked for positions because they are not a great 'fit'. This legislation challenges the fit. If biases are taken off the table, 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.

### **SB1033**

#### **ConnCAN fully supports SB1033: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Computer Science and Financial Literacy as a Part of the High School Graduation Requirements.**

Smart investments in computer science education are necessary to ensure Connecticut kids can compete for tomorrow's jobs. According to the [App Association](#), the computer science field will have over 1 million open jobs by 2024. Unfortunately, only 10% of all schools offer computer science courses ([Code.org report](#)).

Connecticut is already falling behind our neighboring states when it comes to post-recession job growth, and if we fail to have a workforce that's adequately prepared to fill jobs that are being created, our state's economy will never catch up. For example, New York has already "pushed for a greater focus on computer science and coding in education, and last year's budget included funding to train teachers for computer science." ([NY Governor's Office](#))

Access to computer science courses is also an issue of equity. Currently, the ratio of men to women in the computer science field is 4:1. By expanding access, more women have the opportunity to learn about and become computer scientists.

Computer science is vital to developing a 21st-century workforce and this bill ensures that Connecticut leads on this issue.

*Financial Literacy:* Research shows that just 1 in 5 students have basic financial literacy skills. Additionally, as the cost of higher education skyrockets, 1 million students default on their loan debt, and the average student has over \$29,000 in debt ([NYT](#)).

Financial literacy is a necessary skill for the 21st Century.

Right now, 17 states have financial literacy laws on the books. According to the center for Financial Literacy at Champlain College, Connecticut gets an F for its policies in helping support financial literacy in students ([CFL](#))

Connecticut must step up to ensure that students are ready to manage their finances in adulthood. And, while 90% of CT high schools offer a financial literacy course, less than 7% of students are required to take the course for graduation ([JUMP\\$TART](#)).

Connecticut's young people are expected to survive in the adult world with little understanding of finances. For their sake, this must change.

Financial management and literacy are key elements to financial independence. We must keep in mind that supporting financial literacy without addressing underlying economic inequality, will not solve our collective problem. We must acknowledge that better counting the few dollars and cents folks have will not ensure that they'll be able to gain more economic wealth later in life.

Only a world-class education and equitable policies can do that.

## **HB6619**

### **ConnCAN fully supports HB6619: An Act Concerning the Development of a Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Model Curriculum**

Connecticut's education system is highly balkanized, providing a platform for experimentation and a healthy exchange of ideas between districts. Unfortunately, it can also mean that districts are unable to reach economies of scale and have limited capacity

in curriculum development and implementation. Combined with the responsibilities of teaching high-quality content as prescribed by the Common Core State Standards, Connecticut would benefit from having a K-8 model curriculum that all districts can use, if necessary.

Right now, a child could change schools (either within a single district or to a different district) and their educational experience could differ significantly. The curriculum may be chosen by the teacher, approved by the principal and monitored by the district. But, how do we know that the content is rigorous and engaging? What exemplar do we have to compare it to?

By building a K-8 model curriculum, Connecticut achieves three distinct goals:

1. Set a clear baseline for what students could learn in a given year;
2. Provide much needed curricular support for capacity-limited districts so teachers can focus more on delivery than building their own content; and
3. Ensure that curriculum includes culturally competent pedagogy and practice in order to increase understanding and engagement.

Finally, a model curriculum gives Connecticut educators a common language for teaching and learning. While each teacher will differ in their lesson planning and style, all classrooms will have the opportunity to engage in similar practices, thus helping to support CT learning goals.

This model curriculum is a great step in setting expectations for classrooms and supplying much needed capacity for educators and district-level administrators.

## **HB6620**

### **ConnCAN fully supports HB6620: An Act Concerning the Right to Read and Addressing Opportunity Gaps and Equity in Public Schools.**

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

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

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

ConnCAN supports the concepts of HB 6620 because it provides more coordination and support for schools to move the needle on literacy rates.

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

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

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About ConnCAN:

*Founded in 2005, ConnCAN, the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, is leading an advocacy movement to ensure that all kids in The Constitution State have access to a high-quality education, regardless of their address.*

*Our work to improve education in Connecticut springs from our belief in the immense potential found within every child and our responsibility as citizen advocates to do everything we can to ensure we have an education system that lives up to this potential.*

*We strive to be resourceful and nimble as we advance the changes our kids deserve. We aim to see every win—and every setback—as an opportunity to learn what’s working today and envision what might be possible tomorrow. We know we don’t have all the answers and that we can only succeed by constantly testing our assumptions, working in close collaboration with others and investing in an inclusive culture enlivened by diverse viewpoints from across our state.*

ConnCAN is a branch of [50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now](#).