



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5101

Submitted by Bryce Chinault, Director of External Affairs

February 29, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee in **support of HB 5101: An Act Establishing a Tax Credit for Educational Access and Opportunity Scholarships**. My name is Bryce Chinault, and I am the Director of External Affairs for Yankee Institute, a non-profit public policy organization in Hartford dedicated to empowering Connecticut residents to forge a better future for themselves and their families.

Yankee Institute supports HB 5101 because the scholarship program it creates will help all students excel in the classroom today and achieve their dreams tomorrow. This reform does not take any money from public schools and will help improve educational outcomes for all students.

Nearly two dozen other states currently have a tax-credit scholarship program that incentivizes donations to scholarship granting organizations like HB 5101 would establish here in Connecticut. In 2022 alone, there were **325,168 students** utilizing these scholarships in 21 states.¹ This includes states in our region like Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania where the program was recently expanded.²

¹ EdChoice 101 2022 Edition: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EdChoice-101-1.pdf>

² Governor Shapiro Press Release Expands the Child Care Tax Credit for Over 200,000 Pennsylvania Families: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-shapiro-signs-major-bipartisan-legislation-to-fund-student-mental-health-school-repairs-public-defenders-and-teachers-expands-the-child-care-tax-credit-for-over-200000-pennsylvania-famil/>

This reform is of vital importance in Connecticut because in our public school system we are facing one of the largest gaps in academic outcomes between high and low-income households.³

This reform helps eliminate that gap by giving students from low-income households greater access to the same opportunities outside of traditional public schools that are currently available to high-income households and it will also help improve outcomes for all students within traditional public schools.^{4,5,6}

There are hundreds if not thousands of students in every legislative district in Connecticut who could benefit from scholarships that this new program would help foster. There are over 3,000 students here in Hartford alone, over 7,000 in Stamford, over 14,000 in Bridgeport, a couple hundred in Salisbury, over five hundred in East Lyme, over seven hundred in Plainville, and over eight hundred in Newington, just to highlight a handful of examples.

Connecticut spends more money per child on education than almost every other state, and we are home to some of the highest-performing schools in the nation.⁷ At the same time, our K-12 education gaps between high- and low- income households are a problem none of our communities can ignore. A tax-credit scholarship program will help shrink this gap, and it will do so without harming public schools.

Stories like those of Marva Collins, who started an independent school in a poor, crime-ridden community in Chicago, and went on to build a beacon of opportunity for students who were told they could not excel academically should serve as a demonstration of this policy in action and an inspiration for all of us to see it become a success.^{8,9,10}

³ CT Center for Educational Excellence: Connecticut K-8 Educational Achievement Gap: <https://ctcee.org/research/>

⁴ Univ. of AR: Is More School Choice Associated with Higher State-Level Performance on the NAEP?: <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/wordpressua.uark.edu/dist/9/544/files/2018/10/education-freedom-and-naep-scores.pdf>

⁵ Urban Institute: The Effects of Statewide Private School Choice on College Enrollment and Graduation: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/effects-statewide-private-school-choice-college-enrollment-and-graduation>

⁶ Children's Educational Opportunity: Why Education Matters: <https://www.ceoct.org/why-education-matters>

⁷ World Population Review: Per Pupil Spending by State 2024: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/per-pupil-spending-by-state>

⁸ National Endowment for the Humanities: Marva Collins, National Humanities Medal: <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/national-humanities-medals/marva-collins>

⁹ YouTube: 60 Minutes: Marva Collins 1995: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8b1Behi9FM>

¹⁰ Washington Post: Marva Collins: Miracles The Hard Way: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1981/05/31/marva-collins-miracles-the-hard-way/9d26d29f-730a-4aac-b696-04e383c61103/>

One of the most extensive recent studies done on the effects programs like this can have on students, found that not only did scholarship recipients improve but so did students who stayed in traditional public schools.¹¹

There are measurable improvements in academic outcomes, chronic absenteeism, suspensions, and other indicators. These same outcomes can be expected here in Connecticut, and it will be done without taking funds away from public schools.

A 2021 study examined 40 private school choice programs across 19 states and found the programs saved a cumulative \$12.4 billion to \$28.3 billion. That is, on average, \$1.80 to \$2.85 for every dollar spent on the programs.¹² Another study estimates that a \$100 million in tax credit scholarships would result in \$3 billion in economic benefits from higher lifetime earnings and additional benefits in terms of tax revenue and reductions in criminal activity.¹³

Policymakers could consider paring back other tax credits, like the film and digital media production tax credit, if there are any spending concerns.¹⁴

Yankee Institute encourages the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee to pass **HB 5101** so families can access more educational opportunities in Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,

Bryce Chinault
Director of External Affairs, Yankee Institute
bryce@yankeeinstitute.org

¹¹ American Economic Association: Effects of Maturing Private School Choice Programs on Public School Students: <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20210710>

¹² EdChoice: Fiscal Effects of School Choice: <https://www.edchoice.org/research-library/?report=fiscal-effects-of-school-choice#report>

¹³ Commonwealth Foundation: Unleashing Educational Opportunity: <https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/research/unleashing-educational-opportunity/>

¹⁴ Yankee Institute Testimony in Opposition of HB 6929 (2023): <https://yankeeinstitute.org/2023/04/15/testimony-in-opposition-of-hb-6929-submitted-by-bryce-chinault-director-of-external-affairs/>