



**Education Committee Public Hearing
Wednesday, March 14, 2018
Testimony of Enid Rey
Chief Executive Officer, Our Piece of the Pie
Hartford, CT**

Chairperson Fleischmann, Chairperson Slossberg, Chairperson Boucher, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today. My name is Enid Rey, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), a nonprofit organization that manages Path Academy, a public charter high school in Windham.

I am writing to express our strong opposition to House Bill 5451: *An Act Concerning Funding for Regional Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers*. If passed, this bill would strip \$4.7 million in critically-needed funding for public charter schools, funding that was *already approved* under the bipartisan state budget, and transfer it to vocational-agricultural schools. If passed, this would leave our state's charter schools, and the more than 10,000 students we collectively serve each and every day, dangerously short of meeting seat needs for FY 2019. It is wrong and it is a fundamentally unfair way to fund public education.

Our mission at OPP is to help 14- to 24-year-old urban youth become economically independent adults. Path Academy is one of many vitally important ways in which we work towards this mission. Path Academy provides a unique and vitally important learning environment for over-age, under-credited students. Our students come to us from all walks of life. Oftentimes, our students are several grade levels behind in English Language Arts and Math, and many are English Language Learners who have struggled to adapt to traditional district schools. Others have either dropped out of high school previously or were on their way to becoming high school dropouts. By offering a supportive and flexible learning environment for this unique population of students, we are able to rethink and reimagine what school should look like. And in doing so, we are able to help these students get back on-track to graduate from high school, and to be prepared for college, trade or career.

Having access to fair and adequate funding is the only way that Path Academy can continue to meet the needs of this unique and vulnerable population of young people. So when our state approved a bipartisan budget last year, and that budget included the baseline funding Path Academy and other charter schools needed in order to serve our students, we were relieved. We were able to commit to our students that while it wasn't ideal to again be flat-funded at \$11,000 per-pupil, our line item wasn't cut and we would be receiving a \$250 per-pupil increase for FY 2019, enabling us to better serve our students. But if HB 5451 is passed, we will be forced to go back on that commitment.

HB 5451, if passed, would hurt real students sitting in real classrooms at charter schools across the state, including at Path Academy. It would hurt real students who chose a charter school because it provided them the best possible chance at success. HB 5451 would cut more than 400 seats from the bipartisan approved budgeted amount of seats needed for school growth over FY19, leaving less seats than are needed even for the current 2017-18 enrollment, and leaving a number of schools without the funding needed to educate a child in the next grade in 2018-2019.

Having the ability to choose the school environment that works best can make all the difference for a young person, and we recognize that vo-ag schools are a choice that should be available to students who wish to choose it. But public charter schools are no different. Our state should not pick and choose which public school students they will fund fairly. All of these young people are our collective responsibility and our state's future, regardless of the type of school they choose to attend.

I understand the need to make increasingly more difficult decisions in order to meet the needs of students across our state. But this funding is critically and urgently needed to educate young people like the ones we serve daily at Path Academy. The young people that have chosen our school deserve the assurance that their choice will be adequately and fairly funded.

This legislation only further demonstrates how desperately our state needs a unified, single and fair education funding formula for all public school students, inclusive of public schools of choice like charters. While a funding formula was passed last year and is slated to go into effect for FY 2019, charter schools and other schools of choice are left out of this formula. Even worse, this formula still leaves the state with *more than ten* different school funding formulas that have little or no relation to student learning needs, resulting in a wide variance in funding across similar school districts and types of schools. This cannot be the way we fund public education. We can and we must do better.

On behalf of Path Academy, as well as Our Piece of the Pie, I respectfully ask you not to support HB 5451.

Respectfully submitted,

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