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Testimony for the State Education Committee on S.B. 1096
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Hello Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee. My name is Bruce Ravage, and I am the Executive Director of Park City Prep Charter School in Bridgeport, CT.

I'm here today to urge you not to approve SB 1096 because it does not have the best interests of students and parents at heart. The parents and students in my school have been fortunate to have been selected by a lottery to come to a school which has offered hope, and delivered on a promise for them to be more successful than they had been in their former schools. Unfortunately, there are so many others who were not that lucky, sitting on lengthy wait lists and, too often, still languishing in under-performing schools.

I'm here today to talk about my students, the remarkable young men and women I have had the privilege of serving every day, and the tremendous growth that they have made in a school that nurtures them, challenges them, and has them exceeding expectations and breaking stereotypes.

I have spent my career educating students in both traditional district schools and in charters. I understand that there are some who believe that charters "cherry pick" their students, that they do not take students who are truly reflective of their districts, or that they take students who are more advanced than their district peers. These allegations however, could not be less true for Park City Prep.

Park City Prep is a middle school, taking students between 6th and 8th grade. Like most children in Bridgeport, virtually all of our students are students of color and come from low-income families.

Nearly 70% of our students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and 95% of our students are either African-American or Latino.

Starting at 6th grade, almost all of our students come to us from traditional public schools in Bridgeport, most of whom are underperforming.

The majority of our students come in to Park City Prep below grade level on every measurable metric. Within a year, most of our students jump two to three grade levels and within two years, most of our students are performing on par with students in more affluent districts. By the time they leave Park City Prep, our students are

exceeding the performance of their counterparts in nearly every measurable category.

Recently, I was invited by Bridgeport Schools Superintendent Rabinowitz to meet with some of her instructional leaders to discuss best practices, learning what has worked in many of their schools and sharing what makes Park City Prep students succeed. This is a perfect example of how charter schools and traditional district schools can work together for the benefit of all young people. This kind of collaboration should be nurtured and grown, not curtailed.

We don't achieve this success by "creaming" the top students or expelling low performers. We don't make excuses or blame the district, or poverty, or the system. We educate...and we do it well. We've established effective systems, developed engaging curriculum, and foster a culture that encourages students to try their best – to which they respond accordingly. Our students succeed. Despite challenges, circumstances and inherent obstacles, they excel.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Assembly, when you support the growth of charter schools, you give countless other, deserving students an opportunity to achieve similar success. If Park City Prep did not exist, many of our students would be in less effective schools and, no doubt, struggling to stay afloat.

I know that there is a bill before you today that could halt the growth of charter schools. I urge you not to sign it. I'm not asking because I'm anti-district, or because I'm pro-charter. I'm asking because I believe that every child deserves the chance to learn at a school like Park City Prep, and to have the same shot at success that our students have had.

If you sign the Senate's bill as currently constituted, you will be denying students, many of whom are trapped in schools that aren't working for them, like our students were, the chance to get a quality education.

Supporting and growing the charter schools benefits all students. SB 1096 is divisive. It pits one group of students and staff against another. This is not good for education and will do nothing to break the vicious cycle of under-performance of under-represented minorities.

If you believe that every student in this state deserves the opportunity to attend a quality school, and to receive a quality education, please, do not sign this bill.

On behalf of the many thousands of parents literally begging for an opportunity to have the same kind of educational options that those in more privileged communities enjoy, I urge you to consider our plea.