

Testimony of Howard F. McGinn, Ph.D.
New Haven, CT
March 19, 2015

Honorable members of the Education Committee,

My name is Howard McGinn, I reside at 1877 Chapel St., New Haven Connecticut. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I speak in opposition to Senate Bill 1096 now being considered by the Committee that would prevent the creation of new charter schools and the expansion of current charter schools.

I am a retired corporate manager, small business owner, public administrator, and educator. I am Dean Emeritus at Seton Hall University and continue to teach at Seton Hall. I also hold State of Connecticut teaching certification for teaching English and Business, grades 7 – 12. But most importantly, I come as the father of a student at Common Ground High School in New Haven.

Common Ground High School changed our daughter's life. Her elementary school experiences in parochial schools and a year in a New Haven Public school were very difficult. The teaching was very poor most of the time. Class discipline was often non-existent. Samantha was severely, constantly bullied because of her petite size in the New Haven Public school and subjected to persistent racial discrimination by teachers and students in one of the parochial schools because Sam is bi-racial. Because of a house fire and the need to move, Sam spent the 8th grade at Hamden Middle School and, due to the excellent and caring teachers at Hamden, her transformation began. But it wasn't until Samantha came to Common Ground in the 9th grade that our daughter began to discover herself and the world around her.

Common Ground is amazing. It accepts kids from the city and from the suburbs and molds them into a new community of learning where social background becomes irrelevant. How important is this in building community in the Greater New Haven area and in our state? The students at Common Ground thrive in an educational family that stresses traditional learning combined with participation in the world, especially in the environment. Samantha now relishes learning. She is no longer bullied because she lives in a community that teaches respect. She has made many friends and, importantly, has not experienced any racial discrimination. For Samantha, learning has replaced fear.

Because I am a volunteer tutor at Common Ground, I am able to see the outstanding teaching that takes place. For example, recently I worked with a student who was writing a paper about Shakespeare. I was struck by her research ability and her writing skills. She was writing and discussing an aspect of Shakespeare's work at a college level. The young woman is in the 10th grade and arrived at Common Ground with a 5th grade reading ability. She spent time explaining to me two scholarly articles she retrieved about Shakespeare written by scholars at two major American universities.

My daughter plans to become a psychologist specializing in working with teenagers but she is considering other career paths because of the wonderful teaching experience she encounters every day in school.

Both of these young women will be well prepared when they graduate from Common Ground. In fact over 93% of students graduating from Common Ground pursue higher education in colleges ranging from community colleges to Ivy League

universities. This charter school is succeeding.

If Common Ground did not already exist it would have to be invented. And the most amazing thing of all is that this phenomenal education is happening in a school that is forced to operate with a budget that is substantially lower when compared with the budgets of other public schools in the state. Taxpayer dollars invested in a Common Ground education are paying substantial dividends.

I am mystified as to why the Connecticut General Assembly would want to prevent more schools like Common Ground from opening. Why would you want to deny more parents this sort of incredible opportunity?

Common Ground High School is a small public school on a farm in a forest in New Haven. Its existence is crucial to my daughter's educational development. Bluntly put, if Common Ground did not exist she would have no place to go.

There are other students like her that deserve a home like Common Ground. Please don't let them down.