

Testimony of Archbishop LeRoy Bailey

Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee

S.B. 1096

March 19, 2015

Hello. My name is ArchBishop LeRoy Bailey. I am the senior pastor of the First Cathedral Church in Bloomfield, CT and I'm here today because I believe in the importance of education and what it can do to help change lives and communities. I'm here today to advocate for increasing the need for improving educational opportunities for children and parents of Bloomfield and the Greater Hartford area. I also serve as a voice for my community, its students and parents in being a beacon in providing an enriching educational opportunity within our schools. I want to provide an educational environment expanding on the commitment to parents by the State of Connecticut to close the achievement gap and raise the level of academic excellence. We want to utilize the support systems that the state possesses.

In the Greater Hartford area, we have seen families and children suffer from poverty, oppression and a lackluster educational system that is afforded to the lower socioeconomic groups of its citizens. The racial isolation and disparity has contributed to the negative impact of inequality in education in this region.

Bloomfield is the home base off my congregation and most of the youth reside in Bloomfield and the metropolitan area. Currently the district is made up of public, CREC magnet and private and religious based schools. The students at the private and religious based schools are out performing the students in the magnet and public schools on the state's mandated assessments. Racial isolation and poor performance are supported as contributing factors stated from the basic research and data.

These factors are disheartening and they correlate to children with low self- esteem, poor self- image and a poor outlook on their aspirations for a bright future. Most of the students lack the necessary experiences, exposure and competencies toward personal and professional success beyond their primary and secondary educational experiences.

Our children being educated equitably is our greatest desire. The closing of the existing achievement gap is still my major goal and priority. A 'one size fits all' plan for all children isn't working. A plan for providing academic excellence in many innovative systems is my current goal. Racial isolation, economic disparity and the educational climate is not conducive to learning.

Research indicates that students are more receptive to learn and are more eager to learn in their elementary years. The base of knowledge and learning opportunities during these foundational years are crucial. We are proposing an instructional setting that will increase their interest and their preparation for life- long learning and alleviate the deficiencies and impairment during those years.

I do not sit here today and claim that I have all the answers, or that charter schools alone can fix the problems with education that we see in Bloomfield. Charter schools give parents and students who feel abandoned by the system hope, and give men and women who care about their communities the power to say 'no more' to a system that kills dreams and dooms children.

The bill proposed to this committee will halt charter school growth at a time when hitting pause will have drastic consequences for children that need our help now, not later.

We are seeking to fulfill the mission. I am not here today, and I do not seek to open a charter school because I want to destroy public schools. I'm not backed by corporate interests, and I'm not trying to attack unions, or districts or teachers. I'm here today, and I am seeking to start a charter school because I care about the little boys and girls in my church and my community who deserve better.

If you too believe that the children of Bloomfield and Hartford deserve the same opportunities as the children of New Canaan and Darien, I hope that you'll stand with us in support of charter schools and the hope that they provide to communities in need.

Thank you for your time.