

Testimony of Michael Brosnan

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Before the State Board of Education

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Good morning Co-chairs Taylor and López, Commissioner Wentzell, and esteemed members of the Board. My name is Michael Brosnan and I'm pleased to represent Bridgeport Public Schools.

I am here today to address the Board's consideration of expanding charter schools, and the costs associated with doing this, while districts like mine are facing critical financial challenges. As a result of the 2017 budget bill, ECS funding to Bridgeport was essentially frozen. Adding to years of underfunding, my district struggles to meet all of the needs of all of our students. Add to this the elimination of funding for the state's mentoring program (TEAM), and we are also struggling to support our new teachers and effectively help them become the best teachers they can be.

Faced with stagnant underfunding, Bridgeport now has no kindergarten para professionals, leaving our youngest learners subject to large classes where they are forced to learn self-sufficiency and patience while their teacher attends to the other 23 young learners.

There are approximately 21,400 students enrolled in Bridgeport Public Schools. We have 35 Guidance Counselors across the entire city and 40 Social Workers. That's over 500 per counselor – twice the recommended level of 250 students. Effective, really since February 2017, the City has been on a hiring freeze and forced to use long term substitutes in place of certified faculty. Although hires were made simply so schools could open this past fall, long term substitutes remain in nearly every school where certified faculty should be.

We have welcomed over 180 student refugees from Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria and, as you may have guessed, flat funding affects our second language learner programs as well. Siphoning monies away from public schools in favor of selective charter organizations is a reckless choice when citizens are not being supported.

Students in the high schools have to walk TWO miles to school because there are limited school buses and the city cannot afford city bus passes for students within two miles of their neighborhood school. I imagine that every member present would agree that they would not want to leave their house in the blistering cold at 6:30am in order to make it to school on time. Quite frankly, not only would I not want to walk that, I would never make my son do that. It's not much different for elementary students – ages 5-13 walk 1.5 miles.

The impact of the state's disinvestment in education are very real. By comparison, the state continues to expand a parallel system of schools that does not provide equal opportunity to all students. The difference in the state's commitment is very stark and the public schoolchildren who attend their local schools are the victims. I urge you to reject charter school expansion and instead restore funding to programs that help children in Bridgeport Public schools – the citizens' schools.

