

## Statement of Merrill Gay

My name is Merrill Gay, and I am the parent member of the Steering Committee of the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding, speaking here today on behalf of the thousands of families represented by the coalition.

My family and I reside in New Britain. My daughter Vivian, now 16 years old, is a junior who attends New Britain High School and the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts part-time magnet program. My son Gregory, age 10, is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader at New Britain's Vance Elementary School, which means that my wife and I now face the difficult decision of whether to enroll him this fall in a New Britain middle school or to pursue private school options that would offer a higher-quality learning environment with smaller class sizes and other important improvements over what our local public schools are able to provide.

My children — and indeed, every child, whether from New Britain or Greenwich — have within them a potential for greatness, compassion, and civic leadership. But I am not sure that this state's elected officials have the same confidence in our schoolchildren or are willing to make a firm commitment to their future potential. I was shocked when I heard that the State's legal position was that our children do not have the right to even an adequate education. With that attitude, it's no wonder that all we see are broken promises for education aid and increasing numbers of public schools across the state in decline.

Unless the Supreme Court overturns the lower-court ruling that children have no right to an adequate education, my children and our New Britain neighbors' children and children throughout this great state risk losing all hope for long-awaited improvements in their schools. Like all parents, I have high aspirations for my children, and I hope that the education they receive will prepare them to do great things. But, especially in the state's lowest-performing school districts, thousands of children are not being prepared to succeed even in the most modest of terms, such as acquiring the basic skills needed to vote, to move onto vocational training, or to secure a well-paying job.

Unless the Supreme Court rules that schoolchildren have the right to a meaningful education, countless urban, urban-ring, small-town, and rural schools will continue to lack the resources necessary to adequately prepare the next generation of Connecticut citizens, who will live and work in an increasingly technological, knowledge-based, multicultural, and global society.

As a member of New Britain's School Readiness Council, director of an early childhood collaborative, and co-chair of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, I also urge the Supreme Court to keep in mind that children's right to an adequate education begins long before kindergarten. Birth-to-three programs and high-quality preschool are essential for ensuring that children arrive at school ready to learn. These research-proven strategies are essential elements of a meaningful education. Our state leaders must do more than just give lip service to these programs: The State must also adequately fund these programs, especially in communities that serve large proportions of children from single-parent, low-income, and immigrant households.

Ultimately, I am here today because like every parent, I want the very best future for my children, and also because Connecticut parents, regardless of what town they reside in, ought to be able to rely on the public school system to provide a quality education that will equip their children to succeed. Both as a parent and a community organizer who advocates for quality early childhood programs, I beseech the Supreme Court to ensure that all Connecticut children receive the adequate education they deserve.

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