

Statement of Nekita Carroll-Hall

My name is Nekita Carroll-Hall. I am the mother of two children named as plaintiffs in this lawsuit, Ana-Simone and Jacob. Ana-Simone, my daughter, is 10 years old and a 4th grader with special needs. My son Jacob is 8 years old and in the 2nd grade. Both attend the Classical Studies Academy in Bridgeport. I am employed as a social worker for the Bridgeport Public Schools, focusing primarily on children with specialized instructional needs.

I've always worked diligently to give my children the very best I can. Knowing how important preschool is to a child's development, I even paid for my children to attend preschool out of my own pocket, since the state does not provide enough aid to meet the needs of children in this district. However, as a hard-working single parent whose paycheck primarily goes to rent, food, transportation, and other basic necessities, I am very limited in my ability to do much on my own to supplement my children's out-of-school learning experiences.

I decided to become involved in this lawsuit because both in my professional life and certainly in the lives of my children, I have seen how grossly underfunded the Bridgeport schools truly are. Many of the buildings are in deplorable condition. Class sizes are too large given the extraordinary learning needs of a majority of the children. Books, computers, and other important instructional resources are extremely limited. Teachers, administrators, and the rest of us instructional and pupil support personnel are far too few in number. The district especially suffers from a dearth of teachers needed to provide intensive remedial assistance to the many students who require one-on-one or small-group work because they have fallen seriously behind. Nevertheless, against all odds we Bridgeport educators daily struggle to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty for our 22,000 schoolchildren, to make certain that the 40% of them who live in non-English speaking homes acquire solid language skills, and to nurture every child's hope for a fair chance in life.

Yet compared to the quality of schooling provided just down I-95 and elsewhere across the state, Bridgeport children are truly being left behind. Less than a third of our 8th graders read at state goal level, and less than a fourth meet goal in math. Just 7 percent of those who continue to high school meet the state's reading goal in 10th grade. These are just a few of many such indicators of an unconscionably failed state education system.

Indeed, in a city where the median household income is less than two-thirds that of the state median and in which the property tax rate is one of the state's highest, Bridgeport parents, educators, and taxpayers appear to have been set up to fail our children. Our Board of Education's FY09 budget has a deficit of some \$5.5 million. The city's own dire fiscal circumstances means a further erosion of vital resources, including the elimination of all local funding for school-based health centers and the district's dental hygiene program, a 50% budget reduction for school nurses, and a one-third cut in the budget for public libraries. Additional draconian strategies now being weighed will further slash any pretensions of educational adequacy for Bridgeport students. The blame resides not with Bridgeport's exceedingly needy students, not with the city's predominately low-income population, and not with its maxed-out taxpayers. Instead, the blame belongs to the State of Connecticut for its failure to carefully devise, adequately fund, and dutifully enforce an education system that meaningfully serves all.

My message to the Supreme Court is simple: My children, like *all* Connecticut schoolchildren, deserve an adequate education and whatever resources are necessary to ensure quality learning opportunities. Please don't abandon Bridgeport families and their schools. We look to this Court to uphold the right to an education consistent with the 21st century.

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