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Testimony to support a more democratic Board of Education

My name is Stephen Poland, and I am testifying in favor of changes to the City Charter making a more democratic Board of Education through:

- Two seats on the BoE being reserved for parents/guardians of CURRENT NHPS students
- An expansion of elected BoE seats from two to four, reducing the number of mayoral appointments to three
- And the ability of non-citizen residents to serve on the BoE and all city commissions

I was a parent of a student in New Haven Public Schools for 10 years, and currently work as a teacher in a therapeutic special education high school, where I am a proud member of New Haven Federation of Teachers Local 933. I have lived in New Haven for 14 years, during which time I have attended many Board of Education meetings, and have been frustrated and at times disgusted with the Board's inability to function in a way that benefits our students, teachers, and neighborhoods. I have seen several appointed Board members with ties to corporate charter schools stymie attempts to make positive changes to our schools because of their own private agendas opposed to public education serving all students. I have seen student needs around mental health services, nurses, and librarians sidelined by absurd infighting among Board members who have no personal stake in our public schools and no accountability to the public. I have seen people appointed who have no active interest in improving New Haven Public Schools, but simply want a springboard to advance their own status and ambition. There is no transparency around how or why it was that they were appointed to make decisions that have enormous impacts on the lives of all students and staff in our schools.

Our public school system is the single most egalitarian system we have in the United States. As much as we all have criticisms of the race, class, and disability disparities that continue to exist in public schools, our schools accept EVERYONE. In order to rectify these disparities, it is imperative that we have at least two seats on the Board reserved for parents/guardians of CURRENT NHPS students. Issues and conditions change, and we need to make sure there is adequate representation of those who have a current stake in the system in decision making roles. We also have a huge number of non-citizen students in our schools, and as long as adults who are not citizens are forbidden from serving on the Board, those students' concerns and needs cannot possibly be adequately addressed. New Haven takes great pride in calling itself a "Sanctuary City," but how could we possibly be a sanctuary—or a haven—if we exclude such a critical part of our population from making decisions around issues that impact so many of our students? Only non-citizen adults can truly understand the interests and needs of non-citizen students in our schools, and they deserve the right to serve on the Board. Finally, the single greatest problem impacting the Board has been a total lack of accountability, which you have the opportunity to change by making the majority of the seats elected. I cannot count how

many conversations I've had with people about the farce the BoE has become, with most throwing their hands up in defeat because we have no power to hold these Board members accountable. You have the power to change this and make our PUBLIC education system significantly more PUBLIC and democratic by changing the City Charter.

Thank you for considering my testimony,

Stephen Poland, Ph.D.  
English and Special Education Teacher