

Testimony to support a more democratic Board of Education April 20, 2023

My name is Maria-Threese Serana and a resident of New Haven, CT since I moved to the United States from the Philippines in 2005. I live on 47 Avon St. in the City.

I support a more democratic Board of Education where NHPS families and voters have a real voice in the decisions that impact our children.

I am in the process of getting certified as an elementary school teacher, and I have worked as a long-term substitute teacher and a paraeducator in New Haven in 2015-2016, and from 2021 until May 2023. From 15 February to May 10, I was a 5th grade teacher in Roberto Clemente Leadership Academy. I was forced to resign because I called out the math coach's lie about a non-existent district mandate in the math curriculum, but that is another story for another time.

In addition to being a New Haven taxpayer and voter, and a potential teacher in New Haven Public School, I am greatly invested in New Haven public education because I have a 16-year-old son, John Carlos Serana-Musser, who attends Wilbur Cross High School. He is the newly elected student representative in the New Haven Board of Education (BOE). John Carlos, an excellent student and athlete, is a proud product of New Haven public schools since kindergarten.

As a parent and an immigrant in this great city that proudly displays its being a sanctuary to civil war and climate refugees, I believe that the current composition of the New Haven Board of Education does not reflect a democratic and representation of the families that the New Haven Public Schools serve. At present, there are no seats for parents or guardians of students in the NHPS. Only two seats are elected by voters and five are appointed by the mayor. Additionally, there are two high school students who have non-voting seats on the Board of Education. One in four students at NHPS are multilingual learners, and most of them have parents who are non-citizens, but currently non-citizens cannot serve on city boards and commissions unless they apply for a special waiver.

To address this skewed system, I strongly support the proposal to change the BOE composition to include:

- a) Two seats for parents/guardians of current NHPS students.
- b) Four seats for election by city voters and three appointed by the mayor.
- c) Immigrants should be allowed to serve on the Board of Education, as well as on all city commissions.

In addition, based on my experience as an educator in New Haven Public Schools, our City Government must do everything it can to address the teacher shortage. I have personal anecdotes from former New Haven teachers who have moved to other school districts in Connecticut who said that one of the major reasons teachers are leaving the New Haven District is the lack of support from school administration to address student's social and emotional challenges that disrupt learning in classrooms, prevent teachers from doing their jobs efficiently, and adding to the burden and stress. We all know that the pandemic has only worsened this. School

administrators are paid six-figures in taxpayer dollars while teachers, who are in the frontline of educating our children, the future of our society, as we know remain at the bottom of pay grade. School administrators ought to be doing more. As we fight with our teachers and paraeducators union for dignified educators pay and better working conditions, we also demand that schools have enough full-time counselors to help our students and alleviate the burden of ensuring the social and emotional learning of our students that fall on our teachers. Counselors who can effectively reach out to parents and families and get them involved in the problem-solving and educating our children. We also need each school to have a full-time librarian and media specialist. Science has shown that reading books, especially those that tackle difficult topics, help our young children make sense of the world. A school is not complete without a fully functioning library!

Stressed students cannot effectively learn. Stressed teachers cannot effectively teach. If our city government truly want to address the declining state of our education, particularly in New Haven, we must make the Board of Education be truly democratic and inclusive for it to be accessible and responsive by adopting the proposals I have mentioned.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.