



**Testimony of Bob Brown**  
**Chair of Connecticut Education Association Poverty Taskforce**

**Before the Committee on Finance, Revenue, and Bonding**

**Re:**

**SB 821 AN ACT CONCERNING THE REFORMATION OF CERTAIN TAXES AND TAX EQUITY**  
**HB 6187 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESTRUCTURING OF CERTAIN TAXES AND TAX EQUITY**

**March 15, 2021**

Good afternoon, Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, and distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. My name is Bob Brown. I live in Southington, where I taught high school social studies for 41 years. After retiring, I ran for our local Board of Education and am now serving my third term.

I testify today in support of SB 821 and HB 6187.

Seven years ago, I helped form a task force with the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), the largest state teachers' union, to reduce the impact of poverty on students.

The impetus behind the task force was the mania then to require standardized state tests for all students. I used to call them the "How Big Is Your House?" tests, because those who lived in bigger houses tended, on average, to score higher. Why? It wasn't poor teachers, as was assumed by some at the time. It was poverty. We continue to have large achievement gaps because we continue to have large income gaps and inequities in resources and opportunities.

The other impetus is very personal—my wife and I were in Times Square several years ago, in February, on a cold day, and a sign posted on a lit-up billboard said, "Tonight, over 20,000 children in New York City will spend the night homeless." That is just wrong. Society owes it to our children to do better. They are Americans too, and they are humans, and they did not ask to grow up in poverty. And the Covid crisis has only made this worse.

Our task force created a plan to significantly reduce childhood poverty and, in fact, all poverty. The plan was simple—a place to live, a job (one that provided a living wage and basic healthcare), and a quality

education. Since we are a teachers' union, we focused on the details of the quality education. We also emphasize the need for criminal justice reform. Much of our plan is included in the Recovery for All agenda.

Our education proposals include early childhood education, more pre-K programs, adequate funding for ALL schools, neighborhood/community schools that include daycare, job training, extended education programs after hours and during non-traditional school days, recruiting and retaining quality educators—and especially those with black and brown skin, and special training for teachers who teach students living in poverty.

A child who grows up in poverty faces roadblocks to success that those growing up in wealthier households or even those with average income levels do not face. The brain of a child living in poverty develops differently, because of exposure to trauma and stresses fueled by poverty and injustice. Children living in poverty often do not get exposed to reading and cultural opportunities as much in their early years. And, once school starts, if they are behind in reading, it becomes increasingly difficult to “catch them up” as they grow and face continued stresses.

Robert Putnam, renowned author of *Our Kids* and other books on child poverty, says that we lose literally millions of dollars annually to lost productivity. Instead of investing in young adults to obtain jobs and contribute to our economy, we spend vast amounts of money incarcerating men of color for situations that, at their essence, are rooted in historical inequity, bias, and injustice. How many deaths to gun violence could be avoided if the root causes, such as poverty, were eradicated? We also are losing the creativity and positive contributions people could make if they were not instead caught up in basic survival.

How do we pay for all this? If we spend the money now to reduce poverty and its many impacts, we will gain back literally millions of dollars in tax revenue and productivity in the long run. And morally, we will not have to ignore the embarrassing truth that our fellow human beings are struggling daily just to survive in this, the richest country on earth. Our suggestion is to tax the wealthiest, more fortunate citizens in our state, those who can afford to pay, those who enjoy comfortable lifestyles, and those who would benefit down the road from reducing poverty with lower taxes and a more productive workforce. Lifting people out of poverty does not take away from anyone; it adds to the quality of life for everyone.

Let me close with a very real story. A Southington teacher was recently teaching students remotely. One student would not turn on the camera using the laptop our school system provided. The teacher finally asked the student to stay after class. When confronted, the student admitted to being homeless and not turning on the camera for fear of embarrassment and the possibility of that child's mother getting in trouble. To expect that child to learn and to perform as well on a standardized test as a student in a comfortable Southington home is naïve and in fact inconsiderate and heartless. Let's act now, to finally reduce the impact of poverty on all students and make this the truly great state and country we all hope it to be.

Thank you.