



Kathleen Gale
Darien Public Schools Educator

HB 6187 An Act Concerning the Restructuring of Certain Taxes and Equity
SB 821 An Act Concerning the Reformation of Certain Taxes and Tax Equity

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Senator Martin, Representative Cheeseman, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Kathleen Gale. I live in Stamford where I and my children attended Stamford Public Schools, and I am an elementary teacher for the Darien Public Schools. I am a member of the Recovery for All coalition as well as the Connecticut and National Education Associations.

I am testifying in strong support of HB 6187 and SB 821.

Sitting on this committee and being responsible for so much of the revenue that Connecticut families need has given you a front row seat to the economic crisis during this year of the Covid pandemic. You have seen the huge economic divides in this state grow wider and families fall on desperate, desperate times. This cannot be allowed to continue. You have a unique opportunity to take bold action to right these systemic economic wrongs. Connecticut families are suffering, and it is within your power to help change that.

Teaching in Darien where families have the resources they need to be safe, well-cared-for, and continue to learn during this pandemic, while certainly one of the biggest challenges of my professional career, has been edifying because students have what they need to be ready to learn. In Stamford, I know this is not the case. My own neighbors and family members have had significant struggles during this year economically and educationally. My colleagues who teach in Stamford have struggled mightily to reach students.

I live a few miles from where I teach. The minority population of Stamford is approximately 51% while that of Darien is about 4%. The poverty rate in Stamford is just below the state average of 10%, while that in Darien is virtually 0. The median income in Stamford is about \$43,000, while in Darien it is just shy of \$200,000. The gap in lifestyle could not be wider. There is severe racial inequality in income, wealth, housing, education, health care and health outcomes, access to public services between these two communities, and the pandemic has taken a harsh toll on a huge number of our public school students in Stamford, as well as other large urban areas across the state.

This is not abstract for educators. We understand that students who are worried about their next meal or their safety are not available to learn. If their housing is insecure or their parents' jobs are in jeopardy, they will not be able to focus on any lessons let alone remote ones. This, of course, widens the education gap which – ultimately – will add to the economic gap as these students grow up and do not have opportunities for higher paying jobs. It is a cycle, and while I have watched this divide for many years as I parented in Stamford, but taught in Darien, I have never seen it this extreme.

Governor Lamont's austerity budget will only serve to exacerbate these inequalities because it will hit our lower income families, largely people of color, the hardest. And they have already been hit the hardest. It will be crippling. We need stimulus and investment in a growing economy. Connecticut is one of the wealthiest states

in the nation but leads also in income and wealth inequality. It is time for Connecticut to turn that around and lead the nation in inclusive economic growth. This is our opportunity.

We have what we need in this state to do this. We cannot prioritize the ultra-wealthy over our state's economic recovery. I have to say that most of the families I have taught in Darien, and I have 27 years in, are generous to a fault and want to do what is right and also demonstrate that for their own children. I have to believe that is true of the families of means all around our great state. The time is now to reduce the systemic inequities that exist and restore fairness to the tax code.

I strongly urge – no, I BEG the Committee to be bold and realize this moment in time – to have the courage to make the right choice and pass HB 6187 and SB 821.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.