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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS  
THE CONNECTICUT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY FORUM ON POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
AND MINORITY STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN  
BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

Bridgeport Holiday Inn  
1070 Main Street  
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604

Wednesday, May 24, 2000  
1:00 p.m.

Connecticut Advisory Committee Members

- NEIL MACY, Chairperson
- LOU BERTHA MCKENZIE-WHARTON, Vice Chairperson
- ROSALIND BERMAN, New Haven
- MARGERY L. GROSS, Guilford
- PATRICK J. JOHNSON, JR., West Hartford
- MARITZA TIRU, Waterbury

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- RUBY G. MOY, Staff Director
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Connecticut Advisory Committee

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

1:20 p.m.

## Opening and Welcoming Statements

MR. MACY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It's unusual, but sometimes the first session of one of these public meetings doesn't bring everyone out when they should be out. I know we're going -- when we get to the Education component, there's going to be a good-sized crowd.

However, before we begin, let me take the opportunity, first of all, to introduce the members of the Advisory Committee from the United States Commission on Civil Rights, and also to give you a few ground rules relative to how we intend to hold these hearings for today and for tomorrow as well.

My name is Neil Macy. I'm the Chairperson of the Connecticut Advisory Committee of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Sitting next to me on the right is Dr. Ki-Taek Chun, who is the Regional Director of the United States Commission on Civil Rights in Washington, D.C., and he came up to be with us for these two days.

The members of the Connecticut Committee, I'll start on my farthest right and introduce them to

1 you. Each one of these folks will be chairing a  
2 different panel during the next two days, but I'll just  
3 introduce you to them as members of the committee and  
4 formally introduce you to them as they serve as  
5 moderators.

6 On the furthest right is Patrick Johnson.  
7 Next to him is Margery Gross. Next to Ms. Gross is Dr.  
8 Lou Bertha McKenzie-Wharton. Next to Lou Bertha is  
9 Maritza Tiru. You've met me.

10 To the left is Rosalind Berman, who is going  
11 to be the chair of this first panel regarding the  
12 press.

13 I guess we didn't do a good enough job with  
14 the press to get all of the people on the panel to show  
15 up, and let me go over a few ground rules relative to  
16 the hearings.

17 First of all, basically, the first ground  
18 rule is that most of the presentations are going to be  
19 about 10 minutes in length. What we hope each panelist  
20 would do because he may not get through everything he  
21 wishes to say is to give us a statement in writing  
22 because all this gets published when we issue a final  
23 report, and even though the court stenographer keeps  
24 good records, it's always better to hear it in the  
25 words of the person, him or herself.

1           Each person will have until June 23rd to give  
2 us whatever written documentation he wishes to provide  
3 us.

4           I should also point out that if in fact any  
5 panelist has any recommendations he wishes to make, you  
6 know, let us know because we take those things into  
7 consideration, and, last but not least, if anybody has  
8 any questions, we would like one of two things to  
9 happen.

10           Either you must speak loudly to be heard from  
11 where you are, so everybody in the room can hear you,  
12 and also, if you wish, you may, instead of speaking  
13 from your seat, come up to the podium and address your  
14 questions from there because the court stenographer  
15 must get an accurate statement of whatever it is you're  
16 presenting as well as your name and address.

17           Now, we do have -- unfortunately, the Mayor  
18 was unable to be here today, and he did send a  
19 representative, Mr. William Stuart, and, Mr. Stuart,  
20 we'd like to have you say a -- if you'd come up to the  
21 podium, please. Give us your full name and tell us who  
22 you're speaking, and then make your statement.

23           MR. STUART: Thank you.

24           I'm here for the most part on behalf of the  
25 Mayor of the City of Bridgeport.

1 I'd, first of all, like to welcome the panel  
2 for selecting our city, and I think some of the members  
3 are familiar in the last visit that the Commission was  
4 present.

5 It is a great honor, first of all, to have  
6 such a privilege to be part of what we call an open,  
7 honest dialogue, and I think understanding the purpose  
8 of this Commission and their duties and, if you will,  
9 obligation, it's truly an honor, and to have the  
10 community to come forward and to share some of their  
11 concerns, their thoughts and their discussion is great.

12 So, on behalf of -- while you're here,  
13 especially in our city, I hope that you'll take the  
14 opportunity to visit some of our sites and location and  
15 as always, if there's anything that -- during your  
16 stay, that our city can offer and extend to you, we'd  
17 be more than happy.

18 I will be in and out of the different parts  
19 of the conference for the next two days, and once  
20 again, I welcome each and every one of you on behalf of  
21 the City of Bridgeport and hope that you really enjoy  
22 your stay.

23 MR. MACY: Thank you very much, Mr. Stuart.

24 On behalf of the committee, we are pleased to  
25 be here. Normally, people who are in positions of

1 authority are never happy to see a U.S. Commission on  
2 Civil Rights, but we do accept your welcome, and we  
3 hope that when we finish, the dialogue will be  
4 productive, and the city will be improved as a result  
5 of it.

6 I'm told two members of our panel have also  
7 arrived, and if they would take seats up in front. I  
8 think of the problem I had in getting here, you think  
9 you have a problem.

10 Thank you again, Mr. Stuart.

11 MR. STUART: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 MR. MACY: And now, I'd like to introduce the  
13 moderator of the first panel on media, Ms. Rosalind  
14 Berman.

15 Ros?

16 Panel 1: Media Coverage of Minority Communities  
17 and their Effect on Race Relations in  
18 Bridgeport, Connecticut

19 MS. BERMAN: Thank you, Neil, and thank you  
20 all for coming.

21 I know you probably have had to fight for  
22 your seats, but we welcome you, and it's the quality of  
23 the audience that counts, not the quantity.

24 It's my pleasure to be the moderator on the  
25 Panel of Media Coverage of Minority Communities and



1 their Effects on Race Relations in Bridgeport,  
2 Connecticut.

3 Bridgeport, like most other urban centers,  
4 are now going through great periods of change, both  
5 economic and social, and as we enter the 21st Century,  
6 we feel it's time to really address the problems, and I  
7 think nobody knows more about the problems than our  
8 first panelist, who is Councilman Andres Ayala, Jr.,  
9 who is a second-term councilman, and Chairman of the  
10 Black and Hispanic Caucus.

11 He's also a history teacher at Vassick High  
12 School, and I'm sure that you will have lots to inform  
13 us about.

14 MR. AYALA: Thank you.

15 Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Being  
16 a teacher, I sort of try to organize myself and provide  
17 myself with some notes just to keep me going, but,  
18 first of all, I'd like to say thank you to the  
19 Commission for extending the invitation to come here  
20 and be part of this Commission, and also to my fellow  
21 panelists who are here. Thank you for letting me a  
22 part of this.

23 To the public that is here, unfortunately, we  
24 don't have a big number, but I think like he said  
25 earlier, the time is a little bit hard, it being the

1 first one, but those who were able to make it, thanks  
2 for coming.

3 My name is Andres Ayala, Jr. I'm a  
4 councilman for the City of Bridgeport. This is my  
5 second term. I represent the 137th district, which is  
6 the east side of Bridgeport.

7 The topic which we are discussing today,  
8 Media Coverage of Minority Communities and their  
9 Effects on Race Relations in Bridgeport, is of great  
10 importance.

11 When our Constitution was being ratified, the  
12 citizens of this nation asked, better yet, they  
13 demanded that certain rights be spelled out in the  
14 Constitution. Hence, we had the Bill of Rights.

15 The Bill of Rights were meant to protect the  
16 rights of the people so that no one could ever take  
17 them away. The citizens of this nation felt so  
18 strongly, in the First Amendment, they included the  
19 amendment that would protect the freedom of speech and  
20 thought.

21 The First Amendment reads as such: "Congress  
22 shall make no law respecting the establishment of  
23 religion or prohibiting of free exercise thereof or  
24 bridging the freedom of speech or the press or the  
25 right of people peaceably to assemble and to petition

1 the government for a redress of grievances."

2 Freedom of speech and freedom of the press  
3 are fundamental principles that we live by. The press  
4 has a very difficult job which is to provide  
5 information, news, to the citizens of its country,  
6 good, bad or indifferent.

7 One of the issues that I have with the media  
8 coverage of minority communities is that there is no  
9 coverage, unless it is negative news or information.  
10 If it is a shooting, assault or anything negative, then  
11 we have coverage. If not, there is none.

12 To an outsider, someone who's not from  
13 Bridgeport, if you mention certain areas of Bridgeport,  
14 they never visit those areas because of the negative  
15 publicity that it receives, but if you'll just bear  
16 with me and let me educate you a little bit about my  
17 district, the east side, you will see that it's not  
18 what you hear about in the newspaper, in the media, or  
19 on tv.

20 Bridgeport is predominantly a Hispanic  
21 community, although we do have a small community of  
22 African Americans in here, but it's predominantly  
23 Hispanic. We have three catholic churches, big  
24 churches, St. Mary's, St. Charles, and St. Michael's,  
25 not to mention a whole host of other churches,

1 Christian, Pentecostal, Baptist and others.

2 All these churches play a huge role in the  
3 community of providing spirituality, relief and other  
4 programs that keep the youth of the community united  
5 and positive.

6 There are also pockets of inter-communities  
7 that are entirely newer because they usually have the  
8 newsworthy stuff going on. What I mean by newsworthy  
9 are the deaths, the homicides, the assaults and things  
10 of that nature. So, the east side isn't always the  
11 wild, wild west, like I've heard it referred to on  
12 other occasions.

13 I'd like to talk about one neighborhood in  
14 particular, and the reason why it comes to mind is  
15 because it just so happens to be the neighborhood I'm  
16 from. On the lower east side of Bridgeport, there's a  
17 community of co-ops called Mannysville.

18 In this community, you have a complex of 24  
19 co-ops, and if you were to visit this area, you would  
20 be amazed at what you would find. It's a complex that  
21 has 24 families who have lived together, some almost  
22 25+ years. Strong family value ties there.

23 A community where young kids play in a safe  
24 environment, a place where trees and gardens bloom  
25 every Spring. In this community, they all pull

1 together, and they do have their problems, just like  
2 every other community.

3 But for every problem that they have, there's  
4 a whole host of success. There's a whole lot of  
5 stories that are often forgotten.

6 The kids who live there all go to school.  
7 They graduate from high school. So, the problem which  
8 I guess will be spoken about later on, probably high  
9 school dropouts, that's not something that's very  
10 relevant in this community because of the strong family  
11 ties there.

12 In this community, you have teachers,  
13 carpenters, business people, laborers, retirees, and,  
14 yes, some politicians. But what dawns on me is that  
15 the media never really covers that, and here is a  
16 community where the people oftentimes are second-  
17 generation, people who have lived in Bridgeport for 25-  
18 35-40 years. Once they leave, their kids come back,  
19 and they stay in those same co-ops, and the media never  
20 pays any attention to that.

21 We have different functions. We have  
22 neighborhood clean-ups. We have community meetings in  
23 that area. We never get the media. But on a very  
24 unfortunate occasion, the church which most of the  
25 people in that area attend, there was a very, very bad

1 accident in that area, and sure enough, the media  
2 showed up.

3 So, what I ask myself is, when there's a  
4 tragedy, when there's something negative that happens,  
5 the media tends to come to the doorstep, and then they  
6 want to ask questions and find out what's happening,  
7 what's the reason for the things that happen, why did  
8 it happen, but prior to that, when there's so much  
9 positivity going on, especially in that community --  
10 once again, I don't want to say that that's the only  
11 one because there are also a lot of other communities  
12 in the east side and throughout the City of Bridgeport  
13 that are just as fantastic, but that stuff isn't  
14 brought out.

15 Now, I know that the media, the newspaper,  
16 their job is to report the news. That's a fact. We  
17 need to know that in the society, in the nation, the  
18 nation that we live in. It's good to know that we have  
19 a media that isn't going to hide anything, that's not  
20 going to play favorites and not give us the whole  
21 information, everything that we need to know, but by  
22 the same token, by the same token, everything that we  
23 need to know is also the positive things that happens  
24 in those neighborhoods, the great things that are  
25 happening, the kids going from grammar school to high

1 school and many going on to college, coming back to the  
2 neighborhood, coming back to Bridgeport, and giving  
3 back to its community.

4 That stuff is often forgotten. Yes,  
5 occasionally, we might have in the Connecticut Post a  
6 special part where they mention a certain neighborhood  
7 or they might mention something that's going on, but in  
8 my opinion, it's something that needs to be stressed,  
9 especially in this community, in Bridgeport.

10 The City of Bridgeport is definitely on a  
11 rebound. A lot of economic development is happening.  
12 A lot of positive things are happening. Just recently,  
13 I just saw -- as recently today, I seen a newspaper  
14 article that mentioned something about the Bridgeport  
15 schools and being more athletically fit, their physical  
16 education programs being better. That's all well and  
17 good, and that's great. We acknowledge that, and we  
18 thank you for that, but by the same token, we need more  
19 of that.

20 We need the media. We need the news, Channel  
21 12, Channel 30 and all the other local television  
22 stations to come in to these neighborhoods and see that  
23 you not only need it to find out who shot who, who got  
24 busted, who assaulted who, find out who's succeeding,  
25 who's doing well, who's coming back to the community,

1 find out who the community leaders are, and trust me,  
2 just because I'm a politician, I'm not the only one,  
3 there are many, many community leaders out there.

4 Some of my best leaders were the people in  
5 those 24 families that I grew up with, the people that  
6 would show me an example of how to live, show me the  
7 right direction, not all educated, not all with  
8 degrees, but yet if you sat down, and you asked them,  
9 you interviewed them, they would provide the backbone  
10 of what a real Bridgeport family is, a real Bridgeport  
11 Hispanic family or a real African American Bridgeport  
12 family.

13 Now, I don't claim to be an expert on the  
14 media, not at all, but I do know what grabs my  
15 attention, and what grabs my attention is positivity,  
16 and what's going to grab other people's attention is  
17 positive examples.

18 Thank you very much.

19 (Applause)

20 MS. BERMAN: I've been asked to remind people  
21 here that you will have an opportunity to ask questions  
22 after all of the panelists have spoken.

23 It's my pleasure now to introduce Michael  
24 Daly, who is the Managing Editor of the Connecticut  
25 Post. He's been with the paper for 28 years, 23 of



1 those as a reporter covering Bridgeport. He is in fact  
2 a Bridgeport native, grew up on Maplewood Avenue.

3 He also writes a weekly column that appears  
4 Sundays in the paper's Commentary Page, and it's a  
5 pleasure to welcome you here, Mr. Daly.

6 MR. DALY: Thank you, Madam Chair, and  
7 members of the panel.

8 I'm happy to be here, and Alderman Ayala, an  
9 excellent presentation, and you raised questions that  
10 we grapple with at the newspaper every day, and I hope  
11 that we'll have the opportunity to talk about it.

12 I just have a few brief prepared comments. I  
13 think the aim here, whether it's the title is minority  
14 children in the schools or police relations, our goal  
15 is to try to make the town a better place. So, I just  
16 had a couple of points I wanted to mention.

17 I'm thinking of one night of being at a  
18 Democratic campaign headquarters on an election night,  
19 and this was many years ago, and frankly could have  
20 been a Republican headquarters, depending on what the  
21 year was, but the numbers were being posted on the  
22 wall, and I was standing next to a Democratic Party  
23 worker, and as the numbers were going up, it was  
24 becoming very clear that the incumbent was about to  
25 win, and that the Democratic organization would be in

1 power for yet another two years, and this fellow who  
2 was standing next to me just exploded in jubilation and  
3 yelled up and said, "Yeah, baby. Keep those paychecks  
4 coming", and the reason I was reminded of that was  
5 because what we're talking about here, the way to make  
6 a community better, I feel, is for people to get  
7 involved.

8 The people who run Bridgeport, who reap the  
9 rewards of being in that position, and in fact  
10 Bridgeport, any other city or organization in America,  
11 are the people who choose to get involved, whether it's  
12 the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Boy  
13 Scouts, a public commission. It's not enough to sit in  
14 the crowd and criticize. It's not enough to stay at a  
15 safe distance and snipe at whatever the organization  
16 may be.

17 I'm sure that in this room, I'm preaching to  
18 the choir, and I know the hour is tough. I always  
19 thought it was unfair when I was covering Bridgeport  
20 City Hall that organizations would hold public hearings  
21 in the middle of the afternoon. I mean, how did  
22 working people get to go to a hearing when it's, you  
23 know, at 1:30 or whatever, but I realize you have time  
24 constraints.

25 But this is a small symptom of what I'm

1 addressing. The people here understand the importance  
2 of that, but the message has to be spread further.

3 Bridgeport is a direct reflection for better  
4 or worse, whenever you think of it, of the people who  
5 have organized and at the very fundamental level, the  
6 neighborhood, the individual block. The alderman  
7 talked eloquently about, you know, an east side  
8 neighborhood.

9 Some of these people have worked hard.  
10 Sometimes they work hard, it's fair. Sometimes they  
11 work hard, it's not so fair, but they get involved, and  
12 they get what they wanted.

13 A little bit about the media. Just one  
14 rebuttal I'll offer. The alderman said that there's no  
15 positive news in the paper, and I mean, that's simply  
16 not true, and we actively look for positive stories,  
17 and, you know, we can talk about that.

18 But here's one thing, another suggestion.  
19 People assume that the media, whether it's me or  
20 television or Ronelle -- how are you, Ronelle?

21 MS. WILLIAMS: Great.

22 MR. DALY: That we are on mission, that we  
23 know everything, and certainly we have reporters, and  
24 we have -- you know, we try to find out what's going on  
25 in the community, but we are largely dependent, even

1 the reporters who are out on the street, we're  
2 dependent on what people tell us.

3 I mean, you know, I'm just a regular guy.  
4 The editors that run the paper, we're people who live  
5 in different communities, and, you know, we're not on a  
6 mission. We know what people tell us, and what we can  
7 find out.

8 We are trying very hard at the Connecticut  
9 Post to be accessible to people, and if you have a  
10 complaint about a paper that is not accessible, that  
11 you have no input into, then I think you have a  
12 legitimate complaint. I'm not talking about, you know,  
13 the people here, but we are trying.

14 Things have changed, as Ros Berman mentioned.  
15 There's been a lot of change. Everything changes.  
16 Newspapers change as well. 25 years ago, when I  
17 started at the paper, I had an editor, whose name I  
18 won't mention because some people in this room might  
19 know who it was, but the guiding philosophy was we'll  
20 put in the paper what we want to put in the paper.  
21 You'll read it, and that's it. You don't want to read  
22 it, don't read it. We really don't care. That was  
23 pretty much the philosophy.

24 Today, we are exactly the opposite in that  
25 many of our decisions are based on what do our readers

1 want to read about it? What is going to be helpful to  
2 them? And we are very reactive to what the people in  
3 our readership area want.

4 Every story, the reporter's name is there,  
5 phone number, e-mail address. The second page of the  
6 paper has more phone numbers for departments that I  
7 never even knew existed at the paper, frankly. I write  
8 a column on Sunday. My name and phone number is there.  
9 I brought a few cards with me. Anybody who would like  
10 one, that has my direct number on it, I'm happy to give  
11 it out.

12 We are constantly soliciting pieces for a  
13 thing we have called "Young Voices". In fact, there  
14 was one in this morning, where we are trying to get  
15 young people from the community to talk about what's on  
16 their mind. There's another thing called "Your Voice".  
17 It's for adults. They can write in, and it appears on  
18 the Editorial Page, to discuss things that are of  
19 importance to them.

20 The alderman also mentioned the First  
21 Amendment, and it's a very important thing. Freedom of  
22 speech. There's seven or eight rights that the First  
23 Amendment protects, one of which is the freedom of the  
24 press.

25 People sometimes confuse this First Amendment

1 protection of the press. It protects what we want to  
2 say, as long as we're responsible about it; however, it  
3 does not guarantee our existence nor does it guarantee  
4 a community's right to have a newspaper.

5 The fact of the matter is the newspaper is a  
6 business. We have to make a profit in order to keep  
7 people employed. We're a large employer in Connecticut  
8 and contribute a great deal to the tax base.

9 We are owned by a corporation that's based in  
10 Canada. I know the tape is running. They've been very  
11 good to us and give us our autonomy, but the fact of  
12 the matter is we have to be -- if we're not making  
13 money, we can't keep people employed, and we can't keep  
14 printing a newspaper.

15 So, you know, we're balancing our  
16 responsibility to our calling. We don't make a lot of  
17 money. Our responsibility to the neighborhood, and our  
18 responsibility to keep people employed. I mean, it  
19 sounds a little crass. It's not entirely bad because  
20 it forces us to do a lot of thinking every day about  
21 what we put in the paper.

22 But like a lot of other businesses, we don't  
23 have as many people working for us as we did 10 years  
24 ago, five years ago, one year ago. When I was covering  
25 Bridgeport, which I did for a long time, there were

1 probably eight or nine people covering the City of  
2 Bridgeport. Today, we have -- it fluctuates. We've  
3 got two, and if somebody's out sick or on vacation,  
4 we've got one, and we have to hire a correspondent.

5 Do we cover all the meetings that we used to?  
6 No. Do we get into all the neighborhoods that we used  
7 to? No. We're -- you know, like I said, like a lot of  
8 businesses, we're struggling with how do we do more  
9 with less.

10 I'm going to conclude. One of the great  
11 things about working as a newspaper reporter from my  
12 perspective was the opportunity to learn. I have met  
13 people who I will never forget as long as I live. I've  
14 been in circumstances, situations, that some people  
15 might like to have been in, but many people would like  
16 to have not even been near it, but all of them  
17 presented the opportunity to learn by meeting people  
18 from all different walks of life, all different walks  
19 of life, and hearing what they have to say.

20 So, I'm here to answer whatever questions you  
21 have, but I'm also here to listen and to try to keep  
22 learning.

23 Thank you.

24 (Applause)

25 MS. BERMAN: Thank you very much, Michael.

1 MR. DALY: My pleasure.

2 MS. BERMAN: Our next panelist is somebody I  
3 presume needs no introduction, but she does have a very  
4 impressive background.

5 Lisa Braxton is the Anchor of TV Channel 12,  
6 and she is a graduate of Hampton, got her Bachelor  
7 degree in Communications, and her Master's degree in  
8 Journalism, she received at Northwestern, and she has  
9 had much experience for someone so young, and we're  
10 very pleased to have you here.

11 Lisa Braxton.

12 MS. BRAXTON: In speaking on this topic, I'd  
13 like to give you some idea of what a typical day is  
14 like for a broadcast journalist. A lot of my thoughts  
15 are very similar to Mr. Daly's. I agree very much with  
16 what you had to say.

17 So, I'd like to describe for you what it's  
18 like for a tv journalist during a tv journalist shift  
19 at work. My day begins at 2:30 in the afternoon. I  
20 walk in the door, and the 5:00 producer for the 5:00  
21 show will assign me to do a story.

22 So, I'm rushed out the door, rushed on to the  
23 rush hour traffic. I go out and do a story for the  
24 5:00 newscast. I come back in. Typically I'll write  
25 my story in the car racing back to the station. I'll



1 put that together for the 5:00 newscast. I might  
2 introduce the story live on the air or I may just have  
3 it on tape.

4 Then I'll sit down with the 10:00 producer  
5 and discuss what we're going to have for the 10:00  
6 show, and, so, at that point, I'm sent out to do my  
7 10:00 story, out again in the rush hour traffic. This  
8 could be anything, a board of education meeting,  
9 Republican fund-raiser, a fire, shooting, anything. It  
10 could be anything at all.

11 After interviewing all the people I need to  
12 and collecting all the video, we come back to the  
13 station, and that means eating my dinner usually in the  
14 car or in writing my story in the car, and I come back  
15 and get on my computer and type up my story with all  
16 the instructions for my photographer to put it  
17 together.

18 After that, I'll sit down and look over the  
19 entire newscast because I anchor the 10:00 show. So, I  
20 go over the entire hour and brief myself on what I have  
21 to say when I go on the air.

22 Then it's 10:00. It's time to go ahead and  
23 do the newscast, anchor the newscast from 10 till 11.  
24 Then I stay -- we stay, and we fix mistakes we've made  
25 on the air. If we make a big mistake, we have to stay

1 and do that part of the newscast over, and it's  
2 inserted back into the newscast.

3 We also do an update that airs at 2 a.m. So,  
4 we have to stay and tape the news update, about a  
5 three-minute update on the news.

6 So, when you have a schedule like that, with  
7 all this pressure, all the deadlines, it's very hard to  
8 scratch below the surface of the news. It's very hard  
9 to get out into the community and get to know the  
10 people and do in-depth stories and do textured coverage  
11 of what's going on, and to a really good job of  
12 covering minority communities, you need to go below the  
13 surface. You need to spend time in the communities  
14 getting to know the people.

15 I'd like to say that we as journalists are  
16 very skilled at parachuting. We parachute into a  
17 situation, we get all the information, we get the  
18 facts, talk to people, and parachute back out back to  
19 our stations to put the story on the air.

20 We parachute into fires, murders, accidents,  
21 but we need to spend more time in the communities, in  
22 the barber shops, in the grocery stores, in the hair  
23 salons, listening to people and what they have to say,  
24 not just when there's a tragedy but in every day, on  
25 the weekends, after hours, just spending time with

1 people to find out different things that are going on,  
2 different kinds of news and news that's positive, also.

3 We must remember that it's a two-way street.  
4 We can't just by magic know what's going on in the  
5 communities. We need for people to call us up and tell  
6 us and talk to us. If you see us in the grocery store,  
7 approach us and let us know what's going on.

8 I'll give you an example that kind of bothers  
9 me. At my station, we, as most stations and media do,  
10 we have experts that we go to. If we're doing a story  
11 about the stock market or a medical story or we need to  
12 talk to a psychologist about something that's going on  
13 with people's emotions or if somebody takes their life,  
14 we need to have an expert come on and interview them  
15 about what they know about that particular situation.

16 We have a list of people, a pool, in our  
17 rolodex that we go to, and we ask those people to  
18 either come in or we go to them, and we get them on  
19 camera and get their expertise, but it's very rare to  
20 have somebody of color in that pool of people, experts,  
21 that we go to, and one reason we have so many experts  
22 is they call us. People have called me and said, "I'm  
23 a psychologist, and I know about these certain matters,  
24 and if you'd like me to come on the air sometime, I'd  
25 be happy to do that."

1           We need to have more representation, more  
2 people of color who are experts in this part of  
3 Connecticut to come to us and tell us that they're  
4 available, so we can have them on and get their  
5 perspective on things, too.

6           I would love to see more attorneys, doctors,  
7 stockbrokers of color on our newscasts, and I would  
8 love to hear about the neighborhood clean-ups that you  
9 were talking about, things like that. If only you  
10 would call us and let us know, because we're out there,  
11 we're doing our job, but it's just very, very  
12 pressurized, and we have a very short amount of time to  
13 go out and do that. So, we need to have a two-way  
14 street where both sides, we're out there talking to you  
15 guys, and you all coming to us and letting us know, and  
16 my business cards. We're in the phone book. Just call  
17 us up, and I'm willing to come out on my days off, on  
18 weekends, and just come out and spend with people and  
19 getting to know what's going on. We need to have more  
20 of that, more of that going on to improve the coverage.

21           (Applause)

22           MS. BERMAN: Thank you very much, Lisa.

23           And now, our next guest also probably needs  
24 no introduction. Ronelle Williams is the Editor and  
25 Publisher of Umoja News, and we'll now hear from

1 Ronelle.

2 MS. WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, everyone.

3 You must not have gotten my bio. I assume  
4 you didn't get it, which is okay. Umoja News is an  
5 African American newspaper which started four years  
6 ago.

7 I, just by way of introduction, am a product  
8 of the Connecticut Post, and, so, the personal greeting  
9 from Mike was just that, because he was one of my  
10 mentors and my trainers.

11 I would have to say that Umoja is a direct  
12 result of mainstream media's coverage of what you guys  
13 call minority communities. What I find a lot more  
14 accurate and we call communities of color and its  
15 effect on race relations.

16 Prior to my newspaper's start, I heard a  
17 number of very frustrating comments coming from people  
18 of color in the community. This is while I was at the  
19 Post and long after I had left the Post.

20 It was a dominant feeling in the black  
21 community, and I speak, you know, with relation to the  
22 black community because that's where I'm most  
23 comfortable speaking. It was a dominant feeling in the  
24 black community that no news is good news as far as  
25 mainstream media goes because the only time we appear

1 in mainstream media is when something terrible has  
2 happened to us or something -- or we've done something  
3 terrible to someone else.

4 Little or no hard-working, upwardly-mobile  
5 black urban professionals exist in this community. Why  
6 did we think that? Because you very rarely saw them in  
7 the Post or any of the tv stations. The Post is better  
8 than the tv stations, quite frankly, and that the only  
9 leadership in the black community comes from a few  
10 media-friendly preachers or verbose organization heads.

11 Communities of color are the most under-  
12 covered and poorly-served communities by mainstream  
13 media. This is no secret. We all know this, and  
14 that's part of the reason why we're here today, and  
15 like I said before, it's not one particular type of  
16 media, it's all of them. It's television, it's print,  
17 it's radio, and I think the effects that that has on  
18 the individuals in the community are far-reaching.

19 I think that the media, the mainstream  
20 media's neglect of the communities in its coverage  
21 directly results in low self-esteem among people in the  
22 community.

23 It directly results in segregation of the  
24 communities. Why should I be involved when you don't  
25 turn to me to hear my voice in your coverage? Why

1 should I try to come out to this event when the  
2 likelihood is that I'm not going to appear in the paper  
3 or on the tv news?

4 Another direct result is that these people  
5 feel they're not worthy of coverage, and they're just  
6 overall frustrated, and all with good reason. I mean,  
7 these are all feelings that any of us would feel if we  
8 were neglected in the way that communities of color are  
9 neglected by mainstream media.

10 So, what do we do to change these things?  
11 You know, I have mixed feelings about panels like this.  
12 I think that they're great, and I love that they're put  
13 together with real optimism and hope that things will  
14 change. On the other hand, so often you don't see any  
15 change.

16 I served at the Connecticut Post for three  
17 years. They were three really good years. I met great  
18 people. I learned a lot about journalism. When I was  
19 there, from 1990 to 1993, the discussion was how do we  
20 change -- how do we cover -- how do we do a better job  
21 at covering the community?

22 Mike said today they're still talking the  
23 same talk. You know, I'm sure the same thing goes on  
24 at News Channel 12 and all the other places. Lisa said  
25 her day is so busy, it's hard to find those stories and

1 those people, and I know that's true, but the effort  
2 has to be made. I mean, it's not good enough to say  
3 we're trying. The effort has to be -- a real effort  
4 has to be made.

5 Call local funeral parlors, you know, find  
6 out what's going on in the community there. Talk to,  
7 you know, one of the members, not the president  
8 necessarily, of a parent-teacher organization. I mean,  
9 there are a lot of little people in the community.

10 Another thing that, you know, happens that  
11 frustrates me is that the same few people are called on  
12 for -- to represent the entire African American or  
13 Latino community, and so often, particularly here in  
14 Bridgeport, these people are not representative of the  
15 entire community. They're not representative. They  
16 don't carry the voice for the community, and, so, the  
17 impression that gets thrown out there is that person  
18 only, and I think we need to do a better job with you,  
19 because at Umoja, we do, but a better job needs to be  
20 done at trying to reach those smaller people whose  
21 names don't often appear in the paper, who could give  
22 you probably a more accurate picture of what's going on  
23 in the communities that you claim to be interested in.

24 What do we do to change things? We  
25 understand, first of all, that we do not live in a



1 color-blind society, and that race does matter. I  
2 think it's very politically correct nowadays and  
3 comfortable to say race doesn't matter, you know, we've  
4 got -- everybody just wants to get along and be happy,  
5 and that -- while that may be true, it's still  
6 important to know that race matters, and that race  
7 should always enter in the picture when you're working  
8 on a story, whether it's for news, whether it's for tv,  
9 whether it's for radio or whether it's for print.

10 Race should always matter. Do I have the  
11 black voice in this story? Do I have the Latino voice  
12 in this story? Do I have the Asian voice? Something  
13 we never say. Do I have -- is there a Native American  
14 we can find whose voice ought to be heard in this story  
15 if it pertains -- if we have time, and those are the  
16 two biggest ifs, particularly the time one.

17 That's something we hear all the time. We  
18 don't have enough time. How do we find these people?  
19 Well, you know what? If you work 9 to 5 on a Monday, 9  
20 to 5 Monday through Friday, maybe on Saturday, you just  
21 might want to walk through the neighborhood. You might  
22 want to just call some of your sources to dig deeper to  
23 see if they have sources. Other people who might be  
24 able to become sources in the future.

25 These are some suggestions, but race does

1 matter. We all have different perspectives. We have  
2 different backgrounds and different point of views, and  
3 if you reach out to find out what mine is or what that  
4 Latino's is or that Asian brother's is, believe me, we  
5 would be more empowered as a people, not just the three  
6 of us who you chose to ask, but the community as a  
7 whole.

8 It's empowering to give voice to a people.  
9 It's empowering individually for those people to feel  
10 like you've reached out to them and that their opinion  
11 matters, no matter how small it is.

12 We have to come up with new definitions of  
13 news for communities of color. The less sexy  
14 achievement-oriented pieces that appear occasionally in  
15 the mainstream media give the impression that talent is  
16 an oddity in black and Latino communities, and nothing  
17 could be further than the truth.

18 Our communities are bubbling over with talent  
19 and positivity, but you wouldn't know it from day-to-  
20 day reading the mainstream newspapers, and you wouldn't  
21 know it from day-to-day watching the mainstream  
22 newscasts, and that's a crying shame. It really is.

23 You know, I don't mean to pick on you, Mike.  
24 I feel closest to you, but I don't mean to pick on you,  
25 but --

1 MR. DALY: You're not.

2 MS. WILLIAMS: -- as Mike said, that the Post  
3 is always trying to find positive stories to cover, and  
4 I just -- I have to beat this horse and say that  
5 they're not hard to find. They're not hard to find at  
6 all. They're out there. Our communities are bubbling  
7 over with positive stories.

8 I mean, my dilemma at Umoja News is that we  
9 don't come out often enough, and we don't have enough  
10 pages to fill with the positive stories that come in to  
11 my little tiny newsroom. This person's son, that  
12 person's daughter, this person's third nephew twice  
13 removed, they all have wonderful great positive stories  
14 to tell in the community, but they don't get told  
15 because you're sitting back waiting, trying to find  
16 them. It's being out in the community actually finding  
17 them.

18 Getting back to the definition of news for  
19 communities of color, news to mainstream media tends to  
20 mean murder and mayhem. We always -- we all know that,  
21 and people say that all the time.

22 News to alternative papers, including my own,  
23 means different things. I mean, at Umoja News, news  
24 means anything of interest to the African American  
25 community, and, so, I think it's really, really

1 important that we try to come up with new definitions  
2 of news for the different communities, so that all of  
3 our news is covered, and we don't have any neglected,  
4 unheard, silent, frustrated communities of color there.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause)

7 MS. BERMAN: Thank you very much, Ronelle.

8 I'll now open it to questions. Does anybody  
9 on the panel have any questions that they would like to  
10 ask?

11 MR. MACY: Yes. I have a number of  
12 questions. Let me ask one first of the editor of the  
13 Connecticut Post, and also to the tv anchor lady,  
14 woman, I should say. I have to be careful.

15 We planned this meeting quite awhile ago.  
16 There was one short blurb in the Connecticut Post, I  
17 believe it was on Monday. Nothing relative to this  
18 meeting appeared either that I have seen in yesterday's  
19 paper or today's paper regarding it, and I heard  
20 nothing on the tv channel regarding the holding of this  
21 meeting, which is a very important meeting as far as  
22 the people of Connecticut are concerned.

23 Could either or both of you comment on that?

24 MR. DALY: I certainly could. We had a story  
25 in Monday's Connecticut Post that certainly was not a

1 short blurb. It was about 15 or 20 inches in length.  
2 A blurb in my mind is something that's maybe two inches  
3 that gives notice of a 4-H meeting or, frankly, you  
4 know, a board of education meeting in Bridgeport or  
5 whatever.

6 So, I would take sharp exception to that, and  
7 that is sort of a symptom of what often happens with  
8 newspapers.

9 Ronelle, by the way, I'd like to acknowledge  
10 one of the nicest compliments I've had in a long time,  
11 if in any way I was a mentor or helped you do what  
12 you're doing, I am deeply complimented. I am.

13 But in any event, people with newspapers, and  
14 is the Connecticut Post perfect? Absolutely not. And  
15 does mainstream media and alternative media need to do  
16 a better job on a lot of things? There's no question  
17 about it.

18 Nevertheless, people tend to look at the  
19 paper and see what they want to see, overlook what they  
20 either consciously or subconsciously want to overlook,  
21 and hence walk away with an impression that there's  
22 nothing in the paper but bad news. That's flatly not  
23 true.

24 But in any event, I'm sorry if I got a little  
25 rankled there. That was not a blurb that was in the

1 paper.

2 I don't know how many times these meetings  
3 have been referenced in the paper, and if indeed it was  
4 only once, you know, there are a lot of meetings that  
5 we have to pay attention to and get into the paper. We  
6 are not simply a bulletin board for, with all due  
7 respect to the U.S. Commission or whatever, that we are  
8 going to repeatedly do that. So, that's my answer to  
9 that question.

10 Lisa?

11 MS. BRAXTON: Well, you're absolutely right.  
12 We had not done a story about this conference.  
13 Unfortunately, our station doesn't do a great job of  
14 doing preview stories, stories about events that are  
15 coming up. We really need to work on that, but we are  
16 doing a story at 5:00. I'm doing the story at 5:00 for  
17 our newscast about this, and I'll make reference to the  
18 fact that it's continuing through the evening and  
19 tomorrow.

20 But you're right, we didn't do anything ahead  
21 of time. We should have done.

22 MR. MACY: Thank you. That will be helpful.  
23 I have one more since nobody else seems to be asking  
24 questions.

25 I come from the upper part of the state. I

1 live in Bloomfield, Connecticut, which is a small  
2 suburban town to Hartford, and one of the things that  
3 -- and I don't know whether the Hartford Current is an  
4 outstanding paper or not, but one of the things we have  
5 in our local news section, which usually is about eight  
6 pages long, are two pages devoted solely to what we  
7 call "community news".

8 We have somebody writing articles on aged,  
9 somebody writing articles on various aspects of people  
10 of color or other sections of our community. So, at  
11 least two full pages every day.

12 Is there a section in the Connecticut Post  
13 that deals exclusively with what I call not the murders  
14 and everything but the community news of organizations  
15 within the community that deal with the problems of the  
16 elderly and the handicapped and the people of color and  
17 so forth?

18 MR. DALY: We have -- you know, how you title  
19 something. We have pages in the paper that are called  
20 "community news" which is primarily listings of events  
21 that are going on, meetings, whatever. We have a  
22 womanwise section that deals with women's issues, women  
23 in the community, women of color.

24 I mean, throughout the paper, we have stories  
25 about what's going on in the community. So, I don't

1 know if I'm understanding the question.

2 MR. MACY: But no certain section devoted  
3 specifically to these type of -- for example, when I  
4 pick up the Current, I know I go to Section B, Pages 4  
5 and 5 and sometimes 4, 5, 6 and 7, that are devoted --  
6 and, for example, to the -- one of the things we have  
7 every week in our paper is the volunteer of the week,  
8 and we have -- you can't believe the numbers.

9 We have a lady who's 84 years of age, Mrs.  
10 Austin, every week, there's a column in the paper by  
11 her regarding news for the elderly, and the same thing  
12 with other groups as well, but it's -- when I pick up  
13 the Current, I don't have to look through the whole  
14 paper. I know what pages to go to to find out the  
15 local stories that are of interest to us.

16 MR. DALY: Right. Well, I mean, every reader  
17 picks up a newspaper looking for the stories that are  
18 of interest to them. So, you know, what -- I know we  
19 certainly, you know, strive to be like the Hartford  
20 Current every day, but, you know, it's one of our goals  
21 certainly for the new millennium, but, in any event, we  
22 have a senior citizen page, health page. I don't know.

23 I believe we have similar features in our  
24 paper.

25 MS. WILLIAMS: I want to comment on that,



1 yes.

2 MR. MACY: Ms. Williams has a comment.

3 MS. WILLIAMS: First of all, I want to say  
4 that there is a level of frustration with the Hartford  
5 Current among certain communities in the greater  
6 Hartford area as well, but as far as the sections go,  
7 when I was at the Post in the early '90s, there was a  
8 section, and, you know, it was called the "Bridgeport  
9 Life", and there was a "Milford Life", and I think  
10 that's closer to what he's referring to, Mike, where  
11 certain segments of the community or certain really,  
12 really local news was covered, and those sections, I  
13 think, went over really well.

14 Then the management changed, and, you know,  
15 they were got rid of. The risk involved when you do  
16 something like that, though, is that you -- you're  
17 isolating, segregating a certain segment of your  
18 population to a certain segment of your paper.

19 Why aren't we integrated in the body of the  
20 paper? Why are we special in that we need a certain  
21 section? I mean, it's better than nothing. We'll take  
22 it, if that's all you're going to give us, but at the  
23 same time, don't limit me to this little eight-page  
24 section or my people or the elderly, you know. Don't -  
25 - so, there's a risk involved.

1           It's good to have it if that's the only way  
2           that that community is going to get covered, but at the  
3           same time, there is a level of frustration when papers  
4           go that route as well.

5           MR. MACY: I'm just separating hard news from  
6           soft news. There are articles that appear that are  
7           hard news, that appear in other sections of the paper,  
8           but this is what I call school news and things such as  
9           that.

10          MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

11          MR. AYALA: May I interject for a moment? I  
12          think basically my premise on when I spoke was  
13          basically my frustration is that, that as a teacher, we  
14          have -- we can't do it every day. I mean, we could  
15          integrate it into the curriculum, but one of my things  
16          is bringing the newspaper into the classroom and having  
17          my students read the paper, and in doing so, I hand  
18          them the newspaper, and I kind of step back, and I see  
19          what they look to. As soon as they open the paper,  
20          they look for the police log. Okay. They look at the  
21          police log, and they look to see -- they look through  
22          and see what information is there from Bridgeport,  
23          Bridgeport, so and so from this side of town, that  
24          other side of town. So, that's the first information  
25          that they get. Negative. Okay?

1           Look through the rest of the paper, which is  
2 the first part, and they might find a couple other  
3 articles, maybe -- most of the time, negative. There  
4 might be some positive articles in the following pages,  
5 but then they go straight to the horoscopes and then  
6 the sports page for the gentlemen, and that's what the  
7 kids are, you know, -- that's what they had to look at.

8           Once in awhile, there is some of those  
9 sections where you talk about the Bridgeport Life or  
10 some type of -- North Journal occasionally puts out a  
11 newspaper. Your newspaper does a great job, by the  
12 way, Umoja, but my whole thing is it's kind of like  
13 they're already preconditioned. It goes back to their  
14 whole self-esteem, that to find information or  
15 something about someone in Bridgeport, let's turn the  
16 paper and the police log is there.

17           Okay. Let's read the police log to see what  
18 happened to so and so yesterday or the day before, and  
19 that's almost what they're preconditioned to look for,  
20 and will it take, you know, more than being a one-time-  
21 a-week adding in a section on local news, some type of  
22 an item that way, quite possibly that might help to  
23 change things, but many of our youngsters are already  
24 conditioned to look for that type of information.

25           MS. BERMAN: Dr. Johnson had his hand up.

1 DR. JOHNSON: Just a quick question relative  
2 to the exchange between Mr. Daly and Ms. Williams on  
3 the internship or mentorship kinds of opportunities.

4 If I could ask the panelists from the media,  
5 describe a little bit of what you offer, to what degree  
6 do you recruit within the City of Bridgeport, within  
7 the high schools or the local colleges, so that your  
8 introducing young people to the media, young people of  
9 color, young people from minority communities? If you  
10 could talk about that a little bit, please?

11 MR. DALY: I could for a minute. We have a  
12 very active internship program which is in fact just  
13 getting underway because the school year's coming to an  
14 end.

15 We have a -- we started six months ago,  
16 whatever, a thing called the Connecticut Team Panel,  
17 which is made up of kids from all of the communities  
18 that we're involved in, including Bridgeport, and young  
19 men and women, black, Asian, Spanish. It's a racially-  
20 and ethnically-mixed group.

21 They have been working with us. There's  
22 about -- I'm going to say there's about 15 to 20 of  
23 these kids who are involved with that.

24 In the summer, during the school year, we are  
25 doing the same thing. These Connecticut Team kids will

1 be staying with us, and then, in addition, we try to  
2 accommodate any -- today, I got a phone call from a  
3 young woman, happens to be a young woman of color, who  
4 was -- came down and spent a day or two at the paper  
5 last year and wants to come back for the summer.

6 So, we have college kids and high school  
7 kids. We'll probably have a total of, I'm going to  
8 say, 30 this summer who will be assigned to the  
9 different departments at the paper.

10 The main thing is, going back to some of the  
11 remarks I made earlier about having to do more with  
12 less and having a lot fewer people than certainly when  
13 Ronelle was there, we -- these kids work. I mean, we  
14 don't hang them out to dry and say go out and do this.  
15 We'll have someone go with them or we'll have them work  
16 with an editor, but by the time they leave at the end  
17 of the summer, all of them or 99 percent of them will  
18 have had bylines in the paper that they can take back  
19 to their college or high school or whatever.

20 It's a very good program. It's not go get  
21 coffee, go get me whatever. They have to be getting  
22 credit from their college, and if they are a high  
23 school kid, they have to have some acknowledgement made  
24 on their transcript that they were an intern here  
25 because we don't pay them because with the state labor

1 laws, it gets too complicated.

2 So, anyway, we have a very productive  
3 internship program that is -- I invite anybody in this  
4 room to come down, see the mix of kids that we have,  
5 and what we are trying to do for them.

6 MS. BRAXTON: I'd like to add that I did two  
7 summer internships at the Post years back when I was in  
8 college, and it's a very good program, and I did get a  
9 lot out of it.

10 DR. JOHNSON: At the television station  
11 currently, are there similar opportunities there?

12 MS. BRAXTON: We have an internship program  
13 for college students. We might have two or three  
14 college students come in, and they work with the  
15 producer, and they learn how to write stories. They  
16 answer the phone. They make beat calls, but it's not  
17 specifically for people of color. It's whoever  
18 applies, and people are chosen just based on whatever,  
19 and that's really it.

20 Beyond that, I know a lot of school teachers  
21 in Bridgeport, and they ask me to come into the schools  
22 and speak. So, I've come out, and I assume that some  
23 of my colleagues do, too, come out and to the schools,  
24 and we talk to the kids in the classroom, and I give  
25 them an idea of what it is that I do, and we have

1 tours.

2 We have Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, come  
3 through, little kids come in, and they take a tour of  
4 the station to see what that's like, but that's really  
5 about all that we offer.

6 DR. JOHNSON: Thank you. Ms. Williams, I  
7 know your newspaper is --

8 MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, my paper's tiny in  
9 comparison, but we do -- we're always looking for  
10 freelance writers, and what I usually get are students  
11 who have no writing experience, and they just want an  
12 opportunity, and we give it to them, and we don't get  
13 away with giving it to them for free either, unlike the  
14 Post.

15 MR. DALY: People on the payroll are  
16 practically there for nothing.

17 MS. WILLIAMS: That's true. But, yes, we are  
18 always, always looking for writers. We go to the  
19 colleges. We go to the high schools. We put little  
20 ads in the paper ourselves. We do a lot of word-of-  
21 mouth because that's big in the communities of color.

22 So, we're always looking for writers and  
23 photographers and whoever and whatever, just come, and  
24 we'll help train you.

25 One thing I'm really, really proud of is I

1 brought a young woman into my business. She had no  
2 journalism experience, none, not a spec, and I brought  
3 her in, and I trained her. She was a good writer. She  
4 just had a broad talent, and she -- now, she got  
5 snatched away from Umoja News and hired by the New  
6 Haven Advocate, full-time, benefits and everything, and  
7 although they took her and won't let her write for me,  
8 it makes me very, very happy that she could come  
9 through Umoja News, and I could train her and make her  
10 good enough to get a full-time position at another  
11 paper, a really viable healthy paper.

12 I also want to say that while I was at the  
13 Post, I was actually a staff writer, hired straight out  
14 of undergraduate college. I have a degree in  
15 Journalism on the undergraduate and the graduate level,  
16 but it was important once I got there to have certain  
17 mentors, and although Mike says he didn't realize he  
18 was one of them, he actually was.

19 He and Linda Pinto, and there were a few  
20 people who would actually take our work, other than  
21 editors on deadlines, saying where's this, you know,  
22 that kind of thing. There were a few people who would  
23 say, well, if they had a minute, let me read through  
24 this, and this would be better here, and that would be  
25 better there, and that kind of interaction is



1       invaluable to -- it certainly was for me.

2               I mean, everything I learned at the Post is  
3       applied in my newspaper. It's just applied from the  
4       black point of view.

5               MS. BERMAN: Yes, Ki-Taek?

6               DR. CHUN: Well, I want to thank the panel  
7       because you as a panel put your finger on something to  
8       me, to my thinking, something very fundamental, and I'm  
9       trying to get your comments on what the solution,  
10      possible solutions might be.

11              Do I hear you, which I can readily believe,  
12      is the fact that some aspects of minority community  
13      concerns are not covered? There's a question about  
14      whether news should be redefined, but on the other  
15      side, it seems to be very clear that certain aspects of  
16      minority community concerns are not covered, and then,  
17      on the other hand, we hear yes, that may be very true,  
18      and sometimes I can be the person to say that, but  
19      there are reasons, like when she goes -- when Lisa goes  
20      home at 1:00 in the morning, there isn't much one can  
21      do.

22              She has -- I mean, it is unrealistic to  
23      expect anybody to spend more than eight hours on a  
24      given job at low pay or irrespective of pay, and  
25      oftentimes these days, because of the corporate

1 interest in bottom line, I don't think the staff are  
2 given extra time for staff development as such.

3 It boils down to then, either somebody higher  
4 up in the organization say you're doing a great job,  
5 but we'd be interested in enhancing your sensitivity to  
6 minority community-related issues. That kind of  
7 message, built-in incentives and even directives, let's  
8 say, that seems to be one solution.

9 My question really has to do with given that  
10 observation, what does it take, at what level of  
11 organization does it take, to introduce and then  
12 implement that level of reorientation of staff  
13 resources, so that we can encourage new development  
14 along that line, and then eventually that may become  
15 almost a requirement, job requirement?

16 MR. DALY: Are you talking about the formal  
17 training?

18 DR. CHUN: No. At the Post. Let me just  
19 ask. Michael, in the next year, I really want you to  
20 spend more time in developing contacts with the  
21 minority communities, develop some innate sort of, you  
22 know, sensitivity to minority community concerns, and  
23 then be able to sort of bring that into your stories.

24 MR. DALY: Right.

25 DR. CHUN: And I'll be interested in seeing

1 what kind of progress you make, and next year, you will  
2 be evaluated upon, and some such sort of parallel  
3 effort at expensive corporate levels, directives and  
4 staff development, is required; otherwise, you will be  
5 forever busy with all the millions of things that you  
6 have to do.

7 So, it becomes unrealistic to say -- to  
8 expect any staff members doing that on their own. So,  
9 unless we find a weak link in the chain, and we get  
10 there to see what can be done, next year, three years  
11 from now, we may be exchanging the same sort of lament.

12 MR. DALY: Well, I'm certainly going to go  
13 back to where I work with a lot of -- I mean, I'm not a  
14 congenital note-taker, but, I mean, I'm going to go  
15 back with a lot of thoughts about what, you know, we  
16 need to do to be better.

17 I mean, I'd address one comment that Ronelle  
18 made earlier about, you know, when Ronelle was there 10  
19 years ago, we were talking about whatever we were  
20 trying to do, and that today, we're still talking about  
21 it.

22 Well, that's true, and I hope that 10 years  
23 from now, we are still talking and acting, hopefully,  
24 about what we are going to do. We are thinking every  
25 day deliberately about how we're approaching that day's

1 paper.

2 But as I say, I'll come back from this with  
3 lots of thoughts and ideas, and maybe Ronelle and I or  
4 Lisa and I could talk at some other point. So, I can't  
5 make any commitment to you about, you know, what we're  
6 going to do about sensitivity training, but, you know,  
7 we need to be better at getting into the fabric of the  
8 minority community.

9 DR. CHUN: Let me rephrase my question.  
10 Maybe what I meant to ask you -- if I didn't, I'm sorry  
11 about that -- is what is it in the Post corporate  
12 structure that can initiate some such move? Is it the  
13 managing director?

14 MR. DALY: Oh, yes. I could probably do  
15 something.

16 DR. CHUN: Oh, great. Now, how about at  
17 Channel 12?

18 MS. BRAXTON: Well, I was going to say that  
19 it's up to management to set the tone on the kind of  
20 coverage that we do. So, it would probably be a matter  
21 of talking to the news director about --

22 DR. CHUN: Can you give us the name of that  
23 person, do you think?

24 MS. BRAXTON: Yes, Tom Applebee. He's our  
25 news director.

1 DR. CHUN: Would it be appropriate for the  
2 committee to sort of convey the sentiments and  
3 observation that such was discussed and that it really  
4 would be upon sort of his domain to, if he wants to?

5 MS. BRAXTON: That would be just fine. That  
6 would be the most effective way.

7 DR. CHUN: All right.

8 MS. BRAXTON: He's in charge.

9 MS. BERMAN: Is that your final answer? Are  
10 there any other questions for the panel? Are there any  
11 questions -- yes?

12 AUDIENCE: I have a question.

13 MR. MACY: Would you -- when you ask your  
14 question, would you also state your name so we have a  
15 record of who asked what questions? It will make it  
16 much easier for us or come up to the podium?

17 AUDIENCE: My cafeteria voice. My name is  
18 Carmen Perez-Dixon, and I'm principal of Beardsley  
19 School.

20 MR. MACY: Carmen, come on up here.

21 MS. BERMAN: Carmen Perez what?

22 MR. MACY: Dixon.

23 AUDIENCE: D-I-X-O-N. I'm principal of  
24 Beardsley School, and I know for a fact we have a long  
25 list of honor roll and perfect attendance students

1 every marking period. I used to mail it into the Post,  
2 and now I fax it in, and our students also read the  
3 paper, and they see Trumbull and they see other  
4 schools, and they never see themselves, and they  
5 question me, why don't I make it public, and I tell  
6 them I fax it in, but it's never included, and we get  
7 the Post for our classroom.

8 I just wanted to know what's going on there.  
9 The students ask me, and I do all I can because they  
10 need to be honored and feel that they make a  
11 difference, too.

12 MR. DALY: That's an excellent question.  
13 I'll tell you two things. I'll tell you three things.  
14 Number 1, I'll find out what is going on with your  
15 school in particular.

16 Number 2, I would have to figure out why  
17 Trumbull, for instance, is named frankly at all. We  
18 cover 17 communities. There are 25-26 public schools  
19 in Bridgeport.

20 AUDIENCE: 26.

21 MR. DALY: 26. Frankly, I don't know how  
22 many there are in Milford, West Haven, Trumbull,  
23 whatever. We shouldn't be doing some and not others in  
24 much the same fashion that when it's the season, you  
25 know, we get lots of calls for photographers and

1 reporters to go to school plays.

2 People will misinterpret that as, well, it's  
3 good news, so they're not interested. That's not so,  
4 but when you have 50-60, maybe 70, schools having the  
5 school play, you know, but if you want to give me your  
6 phone number when we're done, --

7 AUDIENCE: I'll give you my card, and it's  
8 funny you raised the point, because some crank caller  
9 said that there was some sixth grade students with a  
10 sawed-off shotgun. We had Channel 12, Channel 8,  
11 Connecticut Post, Bridgeport News, at our school, and  
12 it wasn't true. When the good things are happening,  
13 where are they, and if you do find out about our list  
14 on honor roll and perfect attendance, can you list them  
15 retroactively, first, second and third marking period?  
16 We'll take up the whole Post.

17 MR. DALY: I don't want to make any comments,  
18 but I will call you, you know, and we can talk about  
19 this, and I'll give you some kind of an answer.

20 MR. MACY: I should point out one thing.

21 AUDIENCE: Thank you.

22 MR. MACY: I came in last night, and I  
23 attended, quite unannounced, a meeting of the  
24 Bridgeport Board of Education. I just wanted to be  
25 there to get a feel for it, and they passed out some

1 data on some of the schools, and you should understand  
2 that although Beardsley School is not in the best  
3 district of Bridgeport, it had a higher attendance --  
4 average attendance rating of all the schools in  
5 Bridgeport. It was about 96 percent.

6 (Applause)

7 MR. MACY: Am I right, 96 percent?

8 AUDIENCE: That's right.

9 MR. MACY: That's unbelievable, and not even  
10 one board member even mentioned it, and I was really  
11 astounded. You would have said something like how do  
12 you do this? Not a peep. Not a peep. I'm sorry.

13 AUDIENCE: Thank you.

14 MR. MACY: I didn't mean to interrupt.

15 MS. BERMAN: Would you speak up, please, and  
16 give us your name?

17 AUDIENCE: I'm not ready to make a comment.  
18 You said you went to a board of education meeting last  
19 night?

20 MR. MACY: Yes, I did.

21 AUDIENCE: Where?

22 MR. MACY: At the -- it was at City Hall.

23 AUDIENCE: There was no board of education  
24 meeting.

25 MR. MACY: I don't know what floor it was on,



1 but it was about three different schools.

2 AUDIENCE: Okay, okay. I just wanted to  
3 clarify that.

4 MS. BERMAN: Yes?

5 AUDIENCE: I have a question and a comment  
6 for Mr. Daly. I'm a concerned parent --

7 MR. MACY: Would you give your name and --

8 AUDIENCE: Delores Crawford. In reference to  
9 the newspaper, this is a personal scenario. My son  
10 passed two years ago, and there was all type of things  
11 in the newspaper and on the news. I wasn't able to  
12 talk, speak, even breathe at the time, but now I got a  
13 little breath in me, a year later, I think I gave our  
14 first family get-together on behalf of his death and  
15 everything, and I called the newspaper, and I let them  
16 know this.

17 Everybody was knocking on my door, looking  
18 for me, and everything when he passed, about the story.  
19 When I called to ask, hey, we're having the reunion,  
20 we'll try to get someone out, and I haven't heard  
21 anything since, and this year, we're giving another  
22 one. So, I hope maybe -- and I believe I even came to  
23 your newspaper, and everyone else's story was in there,  
24 except the mother's. So, I'm a little concerned about  
25 that.

1                   Now, I got a little bit of oomph in me, and  
2 I'll probably be a little still, you know, but I'm  
3 getting there. So, I'd like to hold you accountable  
4 either to follow up or --

5                   MR. DALY: Absolutely will. This is the  
6 first I'm hearing of it, and I'll talk to you or, you  
7 know, do --

8                   AUDIENCE: Can I have your card?

9                   MR. DALY: Sure can.

10                  AUDIENCE: I'll bug you. Thank you.

11                  MR. DALY: Sure.

12                  MR. MACY: You're going to get a lot of  
13 screaming quarters, Michael.

14                  MR. DALY: That's what I'm here for.

15                  MS. BERMAN: I think there was a hand back  
16 there earlier.

17                  MR. MACY: Would you give us your name for  
18 the reporter?

19                  AUDIENCE: My name is Ted Meekins. I just  
20 wanted to share. I heard some of the discussion. We  
21 just got out of a community meeting, and we came over  
22 from the east end to be part of the panel, to head the  
23 panel discussion.

24                  I was very, very interested in what I was  
25 hearing because just by all the people sitting here, I

1 personally know, and Michael back many, many years,  
2 when he covered Bridgeport Police Department, and we  
3 were involved in many litigations, and he did a great  
4 job covering stories, and, of course, Ronelle, and I  
5 always see Lisa on tv.

6 But what I wanted to say was Bridgeport was a  
7 thriving metropolis at one time, and we had a large  
8 shopping center right next door, and, of course, the  
9 Post was across the street, and I guess because a lot  
10 of reporters went over and ate lunch during lunch time,  
11 there was always coverage concerning the mall, I just  
12 want to give an example here, and how negative press  
13 painted Bridgeport a negative place to be.

14 There were a few purse snatches that  
15 occurred. There was a housing project on the other  
16 side of the highway, and there was always that  
17 connection. A purse snatch, crime, problems, race was  
18 always mentioned. Even if it had nothing to do with  
19 the story, it was thrown in at the bottom, and that  
20 always bugged me, and I would always call the paper and  
21 let them know that that had no impact on anything.

22 But there was another shopping center out  
23 Main Street, the Trumbull Shopping Center. They found  
24 dead bodies in the trunk. They found cars being stolen  
25 constantly, still is, and not one utterance of crime

1 and the impact of crime on that shopping center. That  
2 shopping center's perceived to be a totally crimeless  
3 area. Furthest thing from the truth.

4 The whole Trumbull Police Department works up  
5 there on an overtime basis, but it gave two different  
6 perceptions. One, Bridgeport was high crime, Trumbull  
7 no crime. As a result, our shopping center died. The  
8 other one flourished, and it's still flourishing, and  
9 crime is still flourishing.

10 But that's how negative press can impact not  
11 only on economic development, but it paints a very  
12 negative picture if people are constantly bombarded.  
13 We were so affected by it, that we as people in the  
14 community went to the Post and sat down with the editor  
15 and tried to get -- suggest some changes.

16 We talked about an incident that occurred up  
17 near one of our high schools. We have three high  
18 schools here in Bridgeport, Vassar, Harding, Central --  
19 I'm sorry -- Fuller Havens and Coby, five, but the  
20 public ones are Vassar, Harding and Central.

21 These students were -- there was a football  
22 team, and they asked -- they had all these different  
23 captains from the various teams to come and pose for a  
24 picture, and the Post took the picture, and the picture  
25 was taken on the football field, but what happened was

1 the photographer wanted to get something a little more  
2 racier. So, he found a backdrop of an old dilapidated  
3 building with graffiti written all over it, and he used  
4 that picture in the paper.

5 Now, he took many other pictures, but he used  
6 the picture in the paper and blew it up, showing our  
7 star athletes who were collegebound, and to the  
8 students who are collegebound, these are their  
9 portfolio. They want to use these pictures to help  
10 them to achieve. No one could use that picture with  
11 all that graffiti in the background. It gave the slum  
12 appearance, and it was the only house on the street  
13 that looked like that, and finally the city tore it  
14 down. But again, the wrong message went out.

15 I rose to say we would like to see better,  
16 stronger coverage. We had a football team here in  
17 Bridgeport, Pop Warner, the first time these little  
18 kids won the championship, no one thought they would do  
19 it, went all the way to Florida, not one picture of  
20 this team in the newspapers. They were all Afro-  
21 American kids, of course, but constantly on Sundays,  
22 all the other high school teams, Trumbull, Monroe,  
23 Easton, pictures of all their teams, all their kids,  
24 doing great things on the basketball court and baseball  
25 and whatever, but we get very little as far as impact

1 of our kids doing great things. There are a few in  
2 there, but not like the coverage we see in the bedroom  
3 communities.

4 So, I just wanted to share that, to say that  
5 there seems to be a lot of negative impact coming  
6 toward our kids, and even when they're put in the  
7 paper, need to be a little more justice done to them.

8 MR. MACY: Mr. Meekins, may I just ask a  
9 point on that first? Mr. Meekins, you talked about  
10 certain police matters, and although we have your name,  
11 just so the record could show where the knowledge came  
12 from, could you tell us what your position was or is  
13 regarding police work?

14 AUDIENCE: Well, I was a member of the Police  
15 Department for 29 years. I'm now retired, and now I do  
16 substitute teaching in the high schools.

17 MR. MACY: Okay.

18 DR. CHUN: Can I --

19 MS. BERMAN: Yes, sure.

20 DR. CHUN: What makes you -- how do you  
21 account for what you call, say, disparate coverage,  
22 extensive coverage of one shopping mall and hardly any  
23 coverage for Trumbull or the other shopping malls?

24 Do you think they're just a mere accident of  
25 exposure or proximity or is there something more to it?

1 Can you kind of speculate or share your guesses --

2 AUDIENCE: My opinion?

3 DR. CHUN: Yes, of course.

4 AUDIENCE: You know, a blind man couldn't do  
5 this accidentally. You have to make a conscious  
6 effort. Some people say they do not see color or I'm  
7 color-blind. That means therefore if I'm blind to  
8 color, therefore I do not exist because obviously I'm a  
9 person of color, and if a person says they don't see  
10 me, and therefore I am invisible.

11 So, what I'm saying is yes, it's a pattern  
12 and practice. It's acceptable because there's no one  
13 else there of color or usually there's no minorities  
14 that can sit down and say, look, there's a problem  
15 here. We need to dress this up or we should not do  
16 this or we should do that or be sensitive to what  
17 you're doing, and it isn't there.

18 DR. CHUN: When that was happening, did you  
19 or some of the committee members call this perceived  
20 disparate -- unequal coverage to the attention of the  
21 Post and other media?

22 AUDIENCE: Not only did we go down to the  
23 Post, Reverend Thompson, from East End Baptist Church,  
24 calls from Reverend Williams from Messiah, these are  
25 large black churches here in Bridgeport.

1           At that time, Jimmy Connelly, who was very  
2 active at that time, even called himself, as we asked  
3 him about how did he perceive or what did he think  
4 about what he just saw.

5           We also not only brought the complaint, but  
6 we also brought suggestions, --

7           DR. CHUN: And what happened?

8           AUDIENCE: -- and one of the suggestions was  
9 that in all the high schools, there are student  
10 newspapers. The -- and on these student newspapers are  
11 mixed groups. There's black, Hispanic, white, Asian,  
12 whatever. They're on student newspapers, and they go  
13 to the school to get -- we ask how come these cannot be  
14 apprenticed, and why don't the Post use one of their  
15 trucks and go over to the high schools, pick these kids  
16 up, as part of the curriculum? They can leave the  
17 school, and bring them over to the Post during the  
18 school day, during school time.

19           If it's a 40-minute class, that 40-minute  
20 class that they get credit for while they're working at  
21 the Post, and then go back to school. It becomes the  
22 training.

23           Now, during the summer, they can get jobs and  
24 be paid. During the school time, they're working to  
25 learn a profession. This would become a feeder system



1 for reporters and photographers on the staff at the  
2 Post. The Post has none or very little full-time  
3 minorities, and at times, they don't have any  
4 minorities.

5 DR. CHUN: I'm interested in getting closure  
6 to the episode that you covered. So, you brought to  
7 the attention of the Post officials --

8 AUDIENCE: Yes.

9 DR. CHUN: -- and item, I forget what it was,  
10 but what happened there?

11 AUDIENCE: They talked. They said it was  
12 doable. They could work it out. They had the trucks.  
13 So, transportation was no problem. The superintendent  
14 of the schools at that time, there was no problem. But  
15 nothing ever materialized.

16 We find that many times, corporate people  
17 will say things to you to tickle your ears, and when  
18 you go out the door, your suggestion goes in the waste  
19 paper basket, and they go back to business as usual  
20 because change requires effort, and to keep the status  
21 quo requires no effort.

22 MS. BERMAN: Anybody else have any comments?

23 DR. CHUN: Mr. Daly, is it fair to --

24 MS. BERMAN: Sorry.

25 DR. CHUN: -- extend an opportunity for you

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1 to respond to, if you care to?

2 MR. DALY: I was going to respond, whether it  
3 was, you know, -- whether I was given the opportunity  
4 or not. Would you like me to do it now?

5 A couple of things. I wasn't privy, I guess,  
6 to some of the conversations that Ted may be alluding  
7 to. There's a couple of things. Frankly, I just  
8 described the internship program that we have that has  
9 been going on for, I don't know, four years or so, I'm  
10 going to say, of kids from the high schools who come to  
11 the Post in the summer.

12 Frankly, as I say, I wasn't involved in the  
13 conversations about, you know, the trucks and the kids  
14 and the whatever, but, I mean, taking a kid on a truck  
15 over to the Post for 40 minutes and then back to his  
16 next class, I mean, that simply is not practical.

17 We are trying to do, I think, and the essence  
18 of what you're driving at, and that is bring kids from  
19 the community into the newspaper (a) to let them see  
20 how it works, (b) people with, you know, raw writing  
21 talent or a photographic interest, we bring them in and  
22 have them there.

23 The -- I will address one thing. The  
24 football photo that Ted mentioned was a questionable  
25 decision to use that photo and also action by the

1       photographer who did it, and I will tell you that this  
2       was a few years ago. I believe it was I who wrote the  
3       letter of apology to -- I can't remember who the  
4       chairman of the school board was at the time, but to  
5       Jim Connelly and whatever for what was a lapse of  
6       judgment on our part. No question about it.

7                Another thing I will take exception to, for  
8       once in my life, I can say I wish Ernie Newton were  
9       here. Now, I like Ernie. He's a good guy.

10              DR. CHUN: For those of us that don't know,  
11       would you identify him?

12              MR. DALY: He's the state representative from  
13       Bridgeport, who called me about the Pop Warner Team.  
14       Now, I don't recall if there was a photo of the team in  
15       the paper. You could be right about that. Ernie --  
16       there were several articles, a number of appeals that  
17       we ran to help the fund-raising effort to send the kids  
18       to Florida.

19              Could we have done more? We could do more on  
20       a lot of things, but to suggest that because it was an  
21       inner-city or largely black team, that we ignored it is  
22       simply unfair and untrue. So, I'll say that.

23              The mall. We're talking about -- I'm not  
24       going to put words in your mouth, but 20-15 years ago  
25       perhaps, when the mall was there. Also, I mean, the

1 bodies found in the trunks in Trumbull, I recall the  
2 front page stories about -- was it Tommy Risano or was  
3 it -- it was a Mob guy that got found in a trunk up  
4 there, which we covered extensively, as we do today.

5 I mean, the reference was made before to the  
6 police log. We have written more stuff about crime at  
7 the Trumbull Mall than -- pardon me? Probably.

8 Pardon?

9 I can't, I guess, speak to 20 years ago or 15  
10 years ago. I'm not trying to exaggerate how the mall  
11 got covered as opposed to Trumbull. I don't know. All  
12 I do remember, my mother worked in the mall when  
13 People's bank had a little branch office in there, and  
14 my mother was the manager of that branch, and I  
15 remember People's, you know, and getting up out of  
16 there because there was so much trouble in the mall.

17 So, I think that's it.

18 MR. MACY: Thank you.

19 MS. BERMAN: Yes. Please state your name.

20 AUDIENCE: Yes, I will. My name is Carolyn  
21 Nunn. I'm the President of the Greater Bridgeport  
22 Branch of the NAACP, and my question also is to Mr.  
23 Daly.

24 Anyway, Mr. Daly, I really would like to know  
25 why have the Connecticut Post put so much coverage on

1 the Tilow case. Every single day, it's the front page  
2 story, and we've had numerous things that has happened  
3 in this city.

4 For example, a couple of years ago, a little  
5 girl was brutally raped and murdered, a little African  
6 American girl.

7 MR. DALY: Brenda Hart.

8 AUDIENCE: And I don't remember her getting  
9 this kind of coverage, and it's really an insult to the  
10 African American community to continue to have B.J. and  
11 his mother on the front page of the paper every day,  
12 particularly when those of us in the community hear the  
13 other side, because there's only one side being told,  
14 you know, and we live in that community out there. We  
15 see Carolyn Clark and B.J. every single day, and  
16 because there is a trial going on, but there's another  
17 side to that story, and we don't really think that it's  
18 fair to continue to push that down our throats every  
19 single day.

20 So, is there anything else that can make the  
21 front page? Thank you.

22 MR. DALY: Thank you.

23 (Applause)

24 MR. DALY: I have one question. You  
25 mentioned seeing Carolyn Clark and B.J., and you mean

1 the photo --

2 AUDIENCE: That you do every single day,  
3 front page. Every day. Is there anything else there?

4 AUDIENCE: That's what we see. Top line.

5 AUDIENCE: I'm looking for a response.

6 MR. DALY: Yes. The B.J. case will be on the  
7 front page of the paper until it's resolved. I can  
8 tell you that. Should the photo of the victims be  
9 there? Probably not. I mean, that's a point. If that  
10 is becoming, you know, offensive or overdone, then we  
11 need to do something about that.

12 AUDIENCE: I see letters in your paper where  
13 other people are pretty upset, too.

14 MR. DALY: Okay.

15 AUDIENCE: They're tired of looking at it,  
16 also.

17 MR. DALY: All right. If you're telling me  
18 there's another side to the story that we're not  
19 printing, you know, the defense counsel or somebody  
20 needs to tell us.

21 AUDIENCE: We're not saying that. It's just  
22 that --

23 MR. DALY: We're reporting on what's going on  
24 in the courtroom. This is a case that is -- you know,  
25 has attracted national, if not international, attention

1 by whomever. The slaughter of a little kid and his  
2 mother who were witnesses in a crime. So, I'm not  
3 going to say to you that it's not going to be on the  
4 front page.

5 AUDIENCE: His mother and he should be on the  
6 front page every day?

7 MR. DALY: I just said that the use of the  
8 pictures, we'll reconsider.

9 AUDIENCE: Also, there was another case where  
10 you had a man put his wife through a wood chopper. I  
11 mean, nobody ever knew what happened to him. He put  
12 his wife through a wood chopper, and we never knew what  
13 happened to him. But I'm saying that was not ever --

14 MR. DALY: I mentioned to you --

15 AUDIENCE: So, I just wanted to mention it.

16 MR. DALY: The collective reading of the  
17 paper. The little girl that you're referring to was  
18 Brenda Hart. I don't know how many front page stories  
19 we had on the Brenda Hart case. I wrote columns about  
20 it. I remember writing stuff about it myself,  
21 editorials.

22 The guy who put his wife through the wood  
23 chipper was Richard Krafts. That story was on the  
24 front page of the paper for, my God, I don't know how  
25 long. Does it, you know, appeal to people because it's

1       grisly? I don't know. But there have been other major  
2       crimes that we have covered as extensively as the  
3       Peeler case.

4               AUDIENCE: My name is George Mintz. I have  
5       several short questions, and, Mike, I'll save you for  
6       last, and I'll go to Lisa.

7               MR. DALY: Thanks. I need a breather.

8               AUDIENCE: The sentiment of the Bridgeport  
9       community has been expressed over and over again in  
10      terms of positive news.

11              The students at Central High School, on April  
12      25th, had something called Student Government Day,  
13      where the students actually took over the school. They  
14      acted in the capacity of principal, teachers, guidance  
15      counselors, etc., and we called Channel 12 and the  
16      Post, and interesting enough, each one of them called  
17      back and said we're on our way, and, so, the Board of  
18      Education, the elected officials, were there, and we  
19      said, you know, we called them up and says come on  
20      down, Channel 12 is coming, the Post is coming.

21              So, they rushed down. They got there at  
22      12:30, and 1:30 came and had lunch, and we called back,  
23      and they said we're on our way, and then, one of the  
24      parents came in, and he said, "Why you guys all  
25      gathered at the door?", and we said, "Because the Post



1 and Channel 12 is on their way." He says, "Well,  
2 Channel 12 is certainly not on their way. They're over  
3 at the Boys and Girls Club on the North End because  
4 there's a story over there", and sure enough, someone  
5 went over, and there was Channel 12 at the Boys and  
6 Girls Club because there was a sound bite that talked  
7 about taking over portions of that park to extend the  
8 renovation for Kennedy Stadium. So, that was more  
9 newsworthy.

10 Channel 12 did show up, the only one who did  
11 show up. So, I commend Channel 12 for that. But  
12 Channel 12 came in, and they talked to Stephanie Borges  
13 and Mark Smith. The principal at Central is large in  
14 stature and felt that not one student could replace him  
15 but two, and, so, the media talked with Stephanie and  
16 Mark, and then they went to one of the classrooms to  
17 observe what was going on in the classroom.

18 However, on the evening news, there was at  
19 least 40 seconds of the coverage, and, so, the students  
20 at Central was extremely hurt that something that they  
21 thought was very good. This was done because, and  
22 we'll get into this this afternoon about minority  
23 teacher shortages in the city, and this done to  
24 stimulate some interest on behalf of the student body  
25 that they would take teaching as a serious vocation,

1 which the kids thought was very newsworthy, and to only  
2 get that little 40-second blurb on Channel 12 was  
3 certainly disappointing.

4           Could you tell me why would Channel 12 just  
5 cut out that story?

6           MS. BRAXTON: Well, you're saying you got 40  
7 seconds. It wasn't cut out, right? So, it did air.

8           AUDIENCE: Well, 40 seconds to a student who  
9 turns on a television, and it's gone before they  
10 actually see it, to them, it's cutting it out.

11          MS. BRAXTON: OH.

12          AUDIENCE: Now, I didn't define it, the  
13 students did.

14          MS. BRAXTON: Well, we normally -- either we  
15 do what we call a package, which is a minute 30 story,  
16 a full-length story where you see the anchor on -- you  
17 see the reporter on camera, you hear the reporter's  
18 voice tracked, and that's a minute 30, and those are  
19 larger stories, the more, I guess, more newsworthy,  
20 more in-depth stories, and other than that, we do 45-  
21 second or what's called vo-sots, which is you just hear  
22 the anchor on -- the anchor speaking. You hear maybe  
23 one sound bite from the person on the scene. You see  
24 video.

25                 So, that's pretty typical for those kinds

1 of -- I'm not sure. Was it at the end of the newscast?  
2 Because we do these, what are called, kickers, these  
3 45-second good news kind of ways to end the newscast  
4 with a good news story like what you're describing, and  
5 they typically run about 45 seconds.

6 I mean, listening to what you're saying, I  
7 was hoping that we covered it at all because something  
8 like that, if there's -- if we have -- we have an  
9 hourlong with commercials and maybe 30-40 stories in  
10 the newscast, and the producer of the show decides what  
11 gets the most amount of time, what has the most merit,  
12 and then, when they get everything together, they might  
13 chop stuff off that's not considered the most  
14 important.

15 So, I was wondering if it even got on. So,  
16 I'm glad that we got your story on, but that's pretty  
17 typical for what we do. 45 seconds on that story.

18 AUDIENCE: Okay. The only thing I would ask  
19 is that if you're going to come in to a school  
20 environment and dealing with young people, don't -- I  
21 would advise you not to give them the illusion that  
22 they're going to be on tv because what they did is they  
23 made several phone calls expecting -- okay. A level of  
24 expectation was set that did not happen.

25 MS. BRAXTON: Let me tell you something else.

1 I mean, I'm assigned to go out and do stories, and I'm  
2 told, well, you're going to do a package on this story,  
3 a minute 30 second, full-length story. I go out, and I  
4 talk to several people. We shoot all this video. I'm  
5 writing the story up. I get back. Oh, this other fire  
6 happened. This shooting happened. This, this  
7 happened, Lisa. I'm sorry. You're cut down to 45  
8 seconds. Oh, you know, it's not something I can  
9 control, but it's -- I don't know what to say. It's  
10 just -- it happens that way, and we don't even know  
11 until before we go on what the producer decides as far  
12 as how much time we're allotted.

13 AUDIENCE: The -- Mike, the -- what sticks in  
14 the mind of a lot of people, not only in Bridgeport but  
15 throughout Fairfield County and throughout the Valley,  
16 is prior to you being called the Connecticut Post, I  
17 think you were called the Bridgeport Post, and the  
18 stigma that is attached to Bridgeport is played out on  
19 your Page 2, and I've called the Post on behalf of the  
20 students of Central, and our question to you is, why  
21 would you concentrate so much negative on -- in the  
22 paper in a spot that as soon as you open it, that's  
23 what you see?

24 I'm not disagreeing that people are not  
25 interested in the police blotter, but why does it have

1 to go along with their first sip of coffee? I mean,  
2 why can't it be further over in the paper as it is in  
3 other cities?

4 MR. DALY: That's the question? Why it's on  
5 A-2? I don't know what the thought process was of  
6 having it on A-2. I would tell you that if it were on  
7 A-4, that would also be close to the front of the paper  
8 and would probably raise an objection.

9 I had a phone call from someone the other day  
10 who was complaining about a story that was on A-5  
11 because he felt that was, you know, a very prominent  
12 page in the paper. So, I mean, the content of the  
13 police log, it's going to be in the paper some place.

14 As far as it stigmatizing Bridgeport, I don't  
15 know. I looked at it this morning. There were items  
16 from Trumbull. We were just mentioning that, other  
17 Fairfield County towns. There's a blotter for the  
18 Valley Edition. It's a different thing. It's not  
19 Bridgeport. It would be Valley towns.

20 For our New Haven edition, it would be  
21 Milford, West Haven, those towns, and for our West  
22 edition, it would be Norwalk, Westport, whatever. So,  
23 I don't -- the people here who get the paper would get  
24 the Fairfield County edition, and on A-2, that police  
25 blotter is going to be Fairfield County towns.

1           So, I don't want someone to misunderstand  
2           that this message about Bridgeport or Fairfield County  
3           towns is spread throughout all of our readership area  
4           because that's not the case.

5           AUDIENCE: Is the answer no, you're not going  
6           to consider moving it to another page?

7           MR. DALY: I'll certainly consider it. I'm  
8           just -- I'll consider it. I mean, if it were in  
9           another page of the paper, there would still be  
10          complaints about it.

11          AUDIENCE: I don't think it would be as much,  
12          but thank you for the consideration.

13          MR. DALY: Okay.

14          AUDIENCE: Moving along, when I call the  
15          Post, the Post shared with me that they were going to  
16          start the program of the Connecticut teams.

17          MR. DALY: Hm-hmm.

18          AUDIENCE: And it's a great thing. I mean,  
19          you know, we have some writers at Central that would  
20          love to be a part of this. Unfortunately, she told me  
21          that she did get a response from someone from Central,  
22          and I think we had two, but the deadline had pretty  
23          much closed at the time when I made the phone call.

24          MR. DALY: She being who?

25          AUDIENCE: Siminel.

1 MR. DALY: Hm-hmm.

2 AUDIENCE: Again, in terms of being sensitive  
3 to the needs of all of your constituents, okay, when  
4 you publish the list of teams that is participating in  
5 that project, over half of those teams come from  
6 Trumbull, and when you put two names there from  
7 Bridgeport, it gives the illusion that the children  
8 from Bridgeport was not interested.

9 It also gives the illusion that Trumbull has  
10 something more to offer than the children of  
11 Bridgeport, when in essence the reality of it is the  
12 children in Bridgeport did not know. A little phone  
13 call as those things came in, and I'm not suggesting  
14 how you run your paper, but it seems as though if I had  
15 -- if I wanted to form a group, get a mixed bag, to  
16 cover the community, I would allocate a certain amount  
17 of slots to each city, and then, if I didn't get those  
18 slots filled, I would then offer those slots to the  
19 other areas.

20 We were very, very disappointed because the  
21 slots were closed that so few children came from  
22 Bridgeport.

23 MR. DALY: I don't know what the notice  
24 procedure was, whether a letter went out to schools or  
25 whatever. I mean, if there were indeed a deadline set

1 for it, and the calls came in after the deadline, I  
2 mean, I can talk with Cindy Siminel about what the  
3 procedure was. I don't know what the procedure was,  
4 but you concede that your call came after some deadline  
5 that had been set.

6 AUDIENCE: Yes.

7 MR. DALY: The one other thing that you sort  
8 of touched on is that -- well, you mentioned the  
9 Connecticut Post and the Bridgeport Post. You know,  
10 the name change was not something that was done  
11 lightly, and it goes back to a couple of things I  
12 mentioned at the outset, and that is that a newspaper  
13 -- you know, it's looked at in the community as an  
14 institution. Everybody has a newspaper, but we have to  
15 survive, also. If we're not making enough money to pay  
16 people's salaries, that newspaper will close. There's  
17 no question in my mind about it, and into that void  
18 would step the papers that would suddenly, you know, be  
19 able to grow a larger audience.

20 We had to make it clear to people that we  
21 were not only the Bridgeport Post, so that we could get  
22 both readers and advertisers from a larger area. To go  
23 to a guy in Milford and say you should buy an ad in our  
24 paper, the guy's going to say why do I want an ad in  
25 the Bridgeport Post, you know? Okay.



1           So, we expanded our area of coverage. So, we  
2 were creating, whether it's a Connecticut panel,  
3 whatever it may be, we have to look at a 17-town area  
4 that is sort of our town. Bridgeport, unquestionably,  
5 at the heart of it, both literally and for me  
6 emotionally, but there are a lot of realities that we  
7 have to deal with.

8           AUDIENCE: Going forward then --

9           MS. BERMAN: Excuse me. Mr. --

10          AUDIENCE: Just one last question, and I  
11 promise I won't dominate, but this one is --

12          MS. BERMAN: Excuse me. But we do have --  
13 it's getting quite late, and we do have other people  
14 who want --

15          AUDIENCE: Can I just fit this last one in?  
16 It's quick, and I'll sit.

17          Mike, I'm just concerned. In your Sound-Off  
18 Section, there's a lot of attention being given to  
19 people who are making too many racist remarks about  
20 what's going on in this city, and I wish you would not  
21 publish all of that and all those racist statements.

22          MS. BERMAN: Thank you very much. Sir?

23          AUDIENCE: Good afternoon. My name is Cecil  
24 Young. I'm a community activist. I also do a number  
25 of other things in the City of Bridgeport, and I'm

1 someone who's concerned about Bridgeport and has been  
2 all my life because I've born and raised in Bridgeport,  
3 and as I was sitting here this morning, and I hear all  
4 of what's being basically addressed, which is basically  
5 about the press, and like I say, I thought this was a  
6 forum about rights being violated by police and  
7 community and all that other stuff and the whole nine  
8 yards. I get the feeling it's more than just that.

9 MR. MACY: We have different panels scheduled  
10 for this afternoon, this evening, --

11 AUDIENCE: Okay.

12 MR. MACY: -- and all day tomorrow.

13 AUDIENCE: Okay. No problem. Let me just  
14 address that. That's no problem with that anyway.

15 Nevertheless, in my beginning to make my  
16 remarks about what I was saying, I still think that  
17 even though we pointed out a lot of things that need to  
18 be dealt with in terms of the press, why we was  
19 highlighting things that we thought are important, I  
20 think that likewise we as a community are coming  
21 together to make sure that people like the press and  
22 other people that we feel that is not giving us our  
23 due, to meet with them on a regular basis, to make them  
24 accountable.

25 I mean, as Mike Daly was speaking earlier,

1 that the paper is a business. It's a business designed  
2 to make money. It's a business to highlight news  
3 that's of importance to their concern and so on and so  
4 on, but when we find as a people in the city that the  
5 paper is functioning in, in terms of its hardware and  
6 nuts and bolts, and we feel like we're not getting the  
7 true kind of coverage that we deserve and we need, we  
8 need to as a group begin to not come up here like this  
9 here and make our statements and then just fall by the  
10 wayside and wait till another time you all come again,  
11 and then we bring this issue up again.

12 We need to form a committee that will be  
13 willing to go to meet with Mike Daly, to go meet with  
14 Lisa and them on a monthly basis or on a quarterly  
15 basis to discuss those things that we feel are causing  
16 our neighborhoods to deteriorate.

17 I mean, we got to realize that there's a lot  
18 of things that go on in our neighborhoods that are  
19 important, that are meaningful, that are positive, but  
20 we always put the onus on the press to come to  
21 highlight those concerns, and when we find out that the  
22 press is not doing those things that we feel that are  
23 important to us, we need to bring the press to those  
24 neighborhoods and say, hey, to the press, this is  
25 what's going on in our neighborhoods over and above

1 what you are highlighting.

2 This is what we feel is causing our  
3 neighborhoods to be at the level that it is. I mean,  
4 when you talk about gun violence in the schools or you  
5 talk about violence in the community at large, it  
6 starts in the neighborhoods, okay, and a lot of what  
7 goes on in this country, a lot of what's going on  
8 around the world, if it was dealt with in the  
9 neighborhoods on an on-going basis when it first rises,  
10 we wouldn't have the kind of problems we got in the  
11 schools. We wouldn't have the kind of problems we got  
12 in the malls. We wouldn't have the kind of problems we  
13 got downtown and other places that are causing people  
14 to want to leave our cities.

15 Most of those gangsters, most of those boys  
16 in the hoods that create those attitudes of I don't  
17 give a damn about you, me or anybody else, okay, starts  
18 in our neighborhoods. We know who they are. There's  
19 kids that we know that we grew up with that will shoot  
20 you no sooner than wink an eye at you, okay, and these  
21 same kids that will shoot you will stand there when the  
22 police come up on you, and when the police come up on  
23 you and come into that crowd and ask that crowd who  
24 seen it, and then the police response is, well, no one  
25 gives a damn, no one's saying nothing, because if you'

1 don't give a damn, I don't give a damn, when in essence  
2 we know the real reason why people won't speak up is  
3 because they fear the repercussion.

4           They fear that they have to go back in those  
5 neighborhoods. They fear that they have to send their  
6 kids to those schools where many times these acts take  
7 place. Their kids won't come out to play, and if we  
8 don't deal with what is causing these kind of kids that  
9 run rampant in our neighborhoods, that cause others to  
10 live in fear, that cause us to want to not really act  
11 like we give a damn until it's a major crisis, okay,  
12 we'll always rise up and move when we see things like  
13 what happened to B.J.

14           People who've been involved and testified  
15 against people have always been -- their butt's been  
16 whapped. They've been shot at. They've been kicked  
17 at. That happens seven days a week. There are people  
18 that get shot in this city, beat up in the city every  
19 day that want to testify against those of them that  
20 have whapped them, that have shot them, that have hurt  
21 them, but they fear for repercussion, and if the press  
22 would say to the police department and to the district  
23 attorney's office, hey, lookit here, you're not dead  
24 yet, because they didn't get to that point yet, but if  
25 they're willing to come forward to testify on behalf of

1 someone who shot someone outright in broad daylight,  
2 cold-hearted outright, we should be willing to make  
3 sure that that person gets his due, gets his  
4 protection, gets whatever it needs so that we can  
5 encourage others to come forward.

6 We will not save our neighborhoods if we  
7 continue to ignore what causes people to live in fear,  
8 what causes people to not want to get involved. I look  
9 around this room. Looking in this room today, there's  
10 no white folks here that got these kind of problems  
11 that we're talking about here today. Look, these are  
12 African Americans that are here today, that got  
13 problems, that came out today because they were  
14 concerned about what goes on in the neighborhood, and  
15 I'm saying to you all, not to be saying that I have the  
16 cure-all or that I have the answer to what's really  
17 going on in our neighborhoods, but you need to look at  
18 the kind of people that are here, live in  
19 neighborhoods, that the kind of things that I just  
20 mentioned go on 24/7.

21 Whether you be a white reporter or a black  
22 reporter, they all got the same problems, and I commend  
23 that brother over here for moving on Mike Daly the way  
24 he did and addressing him to the point, by saying what  
25 can we do to get the establishment to want to make his

1 reporters sensitive enough to want to go into those  
2 neighborhoods, to give it the kind of story, give it  
3 the kind of time it needs, to highlight what needs to  
4 be highlighted.

5 I work with the housing authority as a public  
6 safety officer. My job is to supervise overtime  
7 police. I've been doing that for seven years in the  
8 City of Bridgeport. Okay. Now, my question is this.  
9 When those minority reporters who are in the city that  
10 cover so much, my question is this, if I was out there  
11 banging and shooting up somebody and dealing on the  
12 corner, you would find that I was out there doing that.  
13 Why didn't you find it out when I was out there  
14 patrolling our neighborhoods, trying to make our  
15 neighborhoods safer? Why wasn't you out there  
16 highlighting what we were trying to do to make our  
17 people comfortable where we live?

18 That's what I'm saying. So, I say to you, a  
19 lot of times, we have these meetings, and we act like  
20 we're so concerned. If you really are concerned about  
21 taking care of our neighborhoods, highlighting what's  
22 going on, spend the time to go into these  
23 neighborhoods. When we hear about these thugs that are  
24 coming out with them guns that are doing what they want  
25 to do, irregardless of anybody, and getting away with

1 it, and until we deal with those problems, we will  
2 continue to meet here, and we will continue to beat up  
3 on Mike and continue to beat up on Lisa, and whomever  
4 else because the bottom line is, it starts with us, and  
5 we as the people have got the nerve to say hey, hold  
6 on, I don't care who you are, if you're getting paid,  
7 and this is what you're supposed to do, I want it.

8 If you're not going to do it, we need to  
9 figure out what can we do to make them produce what we  
10 want on the level that we want it on and not stop  
11 coming to them crying and begging about what you all  
12 should do.

13 We protested in the '60s. We protested in  
14 the '50s about what we felt was injustice. We can do  
15 the same thing we did back then. We boycotted in the  
16 '50s and in the '60s about what we felt wasn't right.  
17 We can do the same thing again, and I say to you all,  
18 let's not stop coming and asking them, but let's do  
19 what we can for ourselves.

20 MS. BERMAN: Thank you.

21 AUDIENCE: Thank you for listening to me.

22 MS. BERMAN: Thank you.

23 (Applause)

24 MR. MACY: By the way, all those -- you folks  
25 that made comments, it's good to make an oral comment,



1 but as I mentioned at the beginning, we would like to  
2 receive statements in writing, so that we can review  
3 them, and when we prepare our report, we have written  
4 statements.

5 I have one question. I think it's addressed  
6 to Mr. Daly.

7 Many papers -- this is not a bad question.  
8 This is -- many papers have what --

9 MR. DALY: I think there's probably other  
10 people here who have a lot to --

11 MR. MACY: This is a newspaper -- and to Ms.  
12 Williams. This is a newspaper question. Many  
13 newspapers today have what we call a reader ombudsman,  
14 who listens to problems concerning that readers have  
15 and act as their reader's advocate in the councils when  
16 the editors meet, and I wanted to know whether the  
17 Connecticut Post had such a position, and what, if any,  
18 authority or voice does that person have?

19 MR. DALY: Per se, an ombudsman, no, we do  
20 not have. I, however, am here. My phone number's in  
21 the paper, and as I said at the beginning of this, I  
22 have a couple of cards with me, and I'll distribute  
23 them to anybody who wants them.

24 I will talk to anybody who calls with a  
25 complaint about the paper or an observation or a

1 suggestion or, God forbid, a compliment. I will talk  
2 to them.

3 So, if you're looking for an ombudsman, I'll  
4 be that, but to answer your question, some papers have  
5 an official title. We do not.

6 MS. BERMAN: Thank you all very much.

7 MR. DALY: Wait. I thought Ronelle was going  
8 to --

9 MS. BERMAN: Ronelle?

10 MR. DALY: Ronelle is an ombudsman.

11 MS. WILLIAMS: Right. Exactly. I mean, at  
12 Umoja News, we're such a small operation, that we  
13 wouldn't have an ombuds person on staff, but by virtue  
14 of our existence, we are advocates for the community.  
15 That's why the paper was started, and that's basically  
16 my mission, and, so, you know, that hasn't been a real  
17 issue.

18 MR. MACY: The paper is an ombudsman, you're  
19 saying?

20 MS. WILLIAMS: The paper itself would be an  
21 ombudsman for the community.

22 MS. BERMAN: Yes?

23 DR. CHUN: Listening to what this exchange  
24 suggests a question, but I know it sounds awfully  
25 naive. So, bear with that.

1           You know, it's become very clear that there's  
2 good intentions on both sides, and I think as a matter  
3 of fact, you said that. You know, why don't we get  
4 together once in awhile and just talk to us, and if you  
5 want to formalize that idea or observation, what this  
6 says to me is, is there something in the bureaucratic  
7 organizational structure that prohibits or discourages,  
8 say, bimonthly or quarterly, say, meeting of managing  
9 directors of newspapers and the tv stations and so on  
10 and some committees of the people, an hour maybe at  
11 most, two hours, just a very civil sort of exchange of  
12 the perceptions and views and so on, wherever that may  
13 lead to?

14           What prevents something like that happening?  
15 Not exactly that shape, but can anybody comment on  
16 that?

17           MR. DALY: Nothing would prevent that -- I'm  
18 sorry. Go ahead, Carolyn.

19           MS. BERMAN: Excuse me. Excuse me a minute.  
20 Did you want to respond to --

21           MR. DALY: Yes, sure. Nothing would prevent  
22 that from happening, and it's probably a good idea. In  
23 fact, there have been occasional meetings at the paper.  
24 Carolyn has been to the paper, but, you know, it's  
25 always in a crisis situation. Somebody's upset about

1 something and needs to have a meeting.

2 It probably would be far more productive if  
3 there were, you know, a quarterly, every other month or  
4 something, a representative group of people to come in  
5 and talk about things. I'd be amenable to that. I  
6 think that would be a good idea.

7 MR. MACY: Lisa?

8 MR. DALY: I had another thought, but I've  
9 lost it.

10 MR. MACY: Does the tv station have any such  
11 feeling on accepting something like this, what Dr. Chun  
12 recommended?

13 MS. BRAXTON: Well, as I was saying, I would  
14 suggest calling my boss, calling management. I don't  
15 know.

16 MS. BERMAN: Excuse me.

17 MR. MACY: Excuse me.

18 MS. BERMAN: Excuse me. Excuse me. Excuse  
19 me. Lisa, are you --

20 MS. BRAXTON: Yes, I'm done.

21 MS. BERMAN: I'm sorry.

22 MS. BRAXTON: I can't say.

23 MS. BERMAN: I think our time has run out for  
24 this panel, and I would --

25 AUDIENCE: Good afternoon. My name is Olga

1 Norita, and I am the Chair for the State Advisory  
2 Committee of the State of Rhode Island. So, I'm  
3 visiting here because I am interested in what you're  
4 doing, to see if we can replicate it in Rhode Island.

5 But I would be remiss if I didn't mention  
6 something that happened in Providence, Rhode Island.  
7 The Hispanic community, because of the negative media  
8 that we had, began to meet with the Journal, Providence  
9 Journal, and one of the things that happened as a  
10 result of those meetings was that they publicized one  
11 -- at least once a week, on Thursday, we have a Spanish  
12 page, where the Spanish information is provided to the  
13 community, and one of the things that -- the reason why  
14 the Journal did it was because of the -- it's a  
15 business, and they were interested in having the  
16 Hispanic business advertising with them, but also  
17 having the Hispanic community read the paper, and the  
18 reason why the Hispanic business didn't advertise with  
19 the Journal was because it was no Spanish media or  
20 information that concerned the Hispanic community.

21 So, that's what happened in the Hispanic  
22 community, and I just wanted to mention that. Maybe it  
23 can happen in Connecticut as well.

24 MS. BERMAN: Thank you very much, and I would  
25 like to express my thanks to all of the panel members,

1 Ronelle and Lisa, David and Councilman Ayala, and thank  
2 you all for coming.

3 MR. MACY: We will meet again at 3:30 to  
4 begin the second panel.

5 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

6 MR. MACY: Let me just make a couple of  
7 announcements that I didn't make earlier and a couple  
8 of them, to repeat them.

9 First of all, the court reporter has told us  
10 he has problems getting what is said when people in the  
11 audience are talking at the same time that people at  
12 the stand are talking, and that it gibberishes the  
13 whole thing, and he misses out on a lot of comments.

14 So, when we get to the question period, and  
15 you wish to come up and ask questions, ask them from  
16 here where he has a mike that goes into his machine and  
17 don't make comments from the audience because all it  
18 does is interrupt what he gets from elsewhere that  
19 makes it more difficult.

20 The other thing I wanted to mention before we  
21 began, and I forgot to do it before, if you'll look at  
22 your program, where it says Community Forum on Police-  
23 Community Relations and Minority Students in the  
24 School, if you'll look to the back page, you will see  
25 Mission Statements from the United States Commission on

1 Civil Rights, and from the State Advisory Committee.  
2 Our committees are called SACs, S-A-C, State Advisory  
3 Committees, and this outlines the role of each state  
4 advisory committee, and I'm not going to take the time  
5 to read it, but you can read it on your own, but this  
6 gives you an idea of what our role is as members of a  
7 hearing committee.

8 And let me just reintroduce -- you see their  
9 names. In fact, I won't even take Lou Bertha's time  
10 for introducing them. You see all the names of our  
11 committee here, and I'm just going to call on Lou  
12 Bertha to introduce the panelists and start this  
13 afternoon's proceedings.

14 Panel 2: State of Education in Bridgeport in 2000

15 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: My name is Lou Bertha  
16 McKenzie-Wharton, and the panel that I'm hearing is  
17 State of Education in 2000 in Bridgeport.

18 I wish to thank the following persons who  
19 have kindly accepted the invitation to serve as  
20 panelists.

21 Mrs. Mary McDuffie, a resident of Bridgeport  
22 and a Bridgeport Advocate for Children and Families.  
23 She's a doctoral candidate writing a legal dissertation  
24 and is a member of the Action Team.

25 Mr. George Mintz, Manager of

1 Telecommunications and Student Services at Columbia  
2 University in New York City, and he is also President  
3 of the Central High School Parent-Teacher-Student  
4 Association.

5 Mr. Felipe Reinoso. He is a Bridgeport  
6 resident of 31 years, has been a professional educator  
7 for over 16 years in public education, and is presently  
8 principal of the Bridge Academy Charter High School.  
9 He has been recognized with a citation for excelling in  
10 education in the State of Connecticut. Also, he was  
11 recognized as Connecticut Bilingual Teacher of the  
12 Year, and the National Education Association Human and  
13 Civil Rights gave him an award, and he has been given a  
14 President's Services Award.

15 Our next panelist is Attorney Maximino  
16 Medina, Jr., who is a product of the Bridgeport public  
17 school system. He attended Roosevelt School, Blacken  
18 School, and Central High School from which he graduated  
19 in 1976. He went on to obtain his B.A. from Harvard  
20 College and his law degree from New York University  
21 School of Law. He is the father of four children, all  
22 of whom attend the Bridgeport public schools. He is a  
23 partner with the Bridgeport Law Firm of Zeldest,  
24 Sneidel, and Cooper, and has been a member of the  
25 Bridgeport Board of Education since 1993.



1           Mrs. Nancy Geter, our final panelist, was an  
2 elementary school teacher and a central office  
3 administrator for many years in the Bridgeport school  
4 system. She established and organized the first formal  
5 program for the employment of peer professionals in the  
6 schools. She also served as Director of Early  
7 Childhood. She later became Director of the Federal  
8 and State Programs in the school system.

9           One of her major emphases was meaningful  
10 parental involvement, and after her retirement, she was  
11 appointed and later elected to the Bridgeport Board of  
12 Education, where she now serves as president.

13           In order to put the discussion within a  
14 proper framework, I would like to make the following  
15 statement.

16           I am certain the Bridgeport Board of  
17 Education has done extensive research and soul-  
18 searching to establish their Educational Goals 2000. I  
19 know that the Bridgeport Board of Education has looked  
20 at and hopefully has used as a guideline the  
21 Connecticut State Board of Education's Goals for the  
22 21st Century.

23           These State Board of Education Goals are as  
24 follows. Goal 1, to set and meet high expectations for  
25 academic achievement for all students in order to

1 prepare them for a productive adult life and continuing  
2 education and responsible citizenship.

3 Goal 2, to create the optimal environment for  
4 learning by meeting the fundamental needs of all  
5 learners.

6 Goal 3, to set and meet high standards for  
7 the performance of teachers and administrators leading  
8 to and evidenced by improved student learning.

9 Goal 4, to focus resources effectively,  
10 efficiently, and equitably in order to ensure that all  
11 students achieve at high levels.

12 Goal 5, to increase the direct involvement of  
13 all citizens in public education.

14 I feel like you that these goals must be  
15 achieved as we enter and proceed through the 21st  
16 Century. There is much at risk. Research has been  
17 done and shown that cognitive skills matter in the  
18 labor market.

19 Between 1979 and 1996, the medium earnings of  
20 25- to 34-year old males who left school before  
21 obtaining a high school diploma fell by 30 percent.  
22 The corresponding figure for female drop-outs is about  
23 21 percent.

24 Over this same period, the earnings premium  
25 of four-year college graduates received over the

1 earnings of male drop-outs increased from 60 to a 133  
2 percent. The primary explanation for their patterns is  
3 that the demand for unskilled workers declined relative  
4 to the demand for skilled workers.

5 Three decades of research have also shown  
6 that family involvement improves student learning.  
7 This is true whether the child is in pre-school or high  
8 school, whether the family is affluent or poor, whether  
9 or not the parents finished high school, and this is  
10 documented in Epstein's studies in 1991 and Henderson-  
11 Bella 1994.

12 In fact, the most important predictor of a  
13 child's achievement in school is the extent to which  
14 that student's family is able to create a home  
15 environment that encourages learning, expresses high  
16 but not unrealistic expectations for their children's  
17 education in the school and in the community.

18 However, there is a factor that will affect  
19 school-family-community partnerships. This factor is  
20 technology and the use of technology in the learning  
21 process.

22 According to most recent surveys, 40 percent  
23 of minority families have some form of technology, for  
24 example computers, etc., in their homes compared to 75  
25 percent of white families.

1           This has major implications for urban school  
2 systems because technology, along with learning, has  
3 become a part of the information highway. The gap  
4 between the haves and the have-nots will grow faster  
5 because of the growth of technology.

6           Having briefly given the framework for  
7 discussion, I would appreciate if each of the panelists  
8 could respond in some way to how they have addressed or  
9 plan to address some of the State Board of Educational  
10 Goals for 2000.

11           Who would like to begin? Okay. Ms. Geter?

12           MS. GETER: Good afternoon. Can you all hear  
13 me?

14           I know when I was teaching, the kids thought  
15 they sat in the back of the room, I couldn't see them,  
16 couldn't hear them, but I certainly did.

17           I have been President of the Board of  
18 Education now, this is my third year. Previous to  
19 that, I was a secretary, and as was said, for many  
20 years, I was a teacher in the Bridgeport public school  
21 system.

22           I taught mostly early childhood, youngsters  
23 in pre-K to Grade 3, but when I became Director of  
24 Federal-State Programs, I covered the whole gamut, the  
25 whole area, from pre-K to high school.

1 I want to talk about maybe three topics this  
2 morning because I'm sure the other board members will  
3 cover other areas as well.

4 The first area I want to talk about is  
5 student achievement. Student achievement must be the  
6 major goal for us in the school systems. It has been a  
7 problem in most urban areas. I can truthfully say that  
8 we have tried, and we have had had a steady improvement  
9 in our Connecticut mastery scores but not nearly what  
10 they should be. Our children are really very low.

11 We have -- we're looking forward this year.  
12 We're sort of like in a transition year because we've  
13 had a superintendent who's been with us for 18 years,  
14 and we will be having a new administration starting in  
15 September, and one of the things that we told all the  
16 finalists that should be of premiere importance to us  
17 was student achievement, and we looked for people who  
18 had a proven record in student achievement.

19 So, we're very hopeful that we will be able  
20 to this coming year make some great strides when it  
21 comes to student achievement.

22 We've done many things already to help  
23 student achievement. We have coordinated the  
24 curriculum now so that everyone is on the same page as  
25 far as curriculum is concerned.

1           You know, for years, one grade did -- one  
2 room did this, another room did that, and another room  
3 did another thing, and when our youngsters moved from  
4 school to school, they lost out because maybe the  
5 second grade they were moving to was not doing the same  
6 thing the second grade they left.

7           So, we worked very hard on coordinating our  
8 curriculum so that all the children, for example, in  
9 second grade will have the very same topics covered.

10           We have worked in coming up with a booklet  
11 that tells of the expectations of each grade level.  
12 That goes home to the parents at the beginning of the  
13 school year, so they know what is expected of their  
14 first grade youngster, because if they know what is  
15 expected of their first grade youngster, then they will  
16 be able to help them at home, and to ensure that, we  
17 have started on a very ambitious program of parent  
18 training to help those parents who need help in working  
19 within the curriculum area of their youngsters.

20           You know, most of our parents, all of our  
21 parents want the best for their children, but many of  
22 them may not be able to do the things that need to be  
23 done to help them at home, and, so, the desire is very  
24 great, and, so, we've been very successful with parent  
25 training.

1 Parents want to learn. They want hands-on  
2 experience. They want to know what to do. For  
3 example, in the area of math alone, I've had parents  
4 who themselves didn't have basic math, and, so, what we  
5 did was we trained them in basic math, so that they  
6 would feel comfortable working with their youngsters at  
7 home.

8 We also try very hard to make parents realize  
9 their importance to their children's education. Of the  
10 years that I was in education, one of the things that I  
11 did, I was a parent advocate, besides running programs,  
12 and I know how it is very important that parents need  
13 to be able to communicate with the school.

14 It's up to us to find ways so that parents  
15 can communicate with the schools easily, and because of  
16 that, I'm making a recommendation that we establish a  
17 position that's called parent advocate, someone who not  
18 only is well known in the community with parents but  
19 someone who has the respect of the teachers and  
20 administrators, someone that when a parent has a  
21 problem, they can call, and this person can intercede  
22 to see if they can solve that problem.

23 Many of our parents feel that when they call  
24 in to the schools, no one follows through. They will  
25 call me and say I called so and so and so, and it ended

1 right there. This person's responsibility will be to  
2 start and show that parent how to work through the  
3 complaint procedure, which we do have a complaint  
4 procedure, to reach their goal of helping their  
5 youngsters.

6 We've had a complaint procedure in Bridgeport  
7 since 1984, but I don't think that it's too well  
8 published, and that's one of the things that I'm going  
9 to work very hard on next year, to make sure that all  
10 the parents know that there is a complaint -- a formal  
11 complaint procedure that can be filed, and that there  
12 are steps to be taken to reach their goal.

13 Also, we have a parent center which we have  
14 established down at the university, where parents can  
15 go for all kinds of help. We have -- as a matter of  
16 fact, not just parents, we have a technology center  
17 there, so that parents need to keep up with their  
18 youngsters, are able to go and get training in  
19 technology.

20 You know, what happens is the youngsters know  
21 how to do it, and the parents feel very helpless, very  
22 helpless, because I know I did and still do, but young  
23 people find it very easy, very easy. Their minds are  
24 not cluttered like ours are, as you know, with all this  
25 that we've had up here, and they can really get into



1 that technology.

2 So, at the parent center, we do have  
3 computers set up there. We have instructors set up who  
4 will work on a very basic level and move right along to  
5 make sure that our parents are able to help their  
6 youngsters because, as was said before, technology is  
7 the wave not of the future, it's the wave of now.  
8 Children must be able to use technology.

9 Another thing that I am very concerned about  
10 and want to work on is providing a safe and healthy  
11 environment for our youngsters. We have had a lot of  
12 problems in the past year about maintenance. Our  
13 schools are old, and certainly the older they get, the  
14 harder they are to maintain, and, so, one of the things  
15 that we have started is a very ambitious program of  
16 rebuilding and renovating schools.

17 As a matter of fact, if I can find my notes  
18 here, we already have completed two school renovations.  
19 We have three others that are at certain stages of  
20 being completed. We have approved for next year a new  
21 west end school. It's an additional school. That's  
22 six. That will be a complete brand-new school, to  
23 replace a school that was -- what is it? A hundred  
24 years old? A hundred years old and looking a hundred  
25 years old.

1           We also, in June of '99, were -- we submitted  
2 application for three brand-new schools, and they have  
3 been approved. So, we are really on a very ambitious  
4 renovation, expansion and building of new schools.

5           As a matter of fact, we're not stopping  
6 there. In 2000, we already have two more schools that  
7 we would like to be replaced, and 1-2-3-4-5-6 schools  
8 to be submitted in 2000 for renovations. So,  
9 Bridgeport is really on a very ambitious program of  
10 school renovation.

11           The other thing that I wanted to talk about  
12 was some of the things that are available to parents in  
13 our community. We talked already about the parent  
14 center, and at the parent center, they can get all  
15 kinds of training. They can get -- there's a lending  
16 library down there. You can go down there and select  
17 books because the problem with many parents is that  
18 they're not able to afford to have the books in the  
19 home, and, so, they can go down there and select books  
20 that the children can -- they can be taken home. They  
21 can read those books.

22           We also have something else that has been  
23 initiated quite awhile, which also needs a lot of  
24 publication, is our parent hot line. We have a hot  
25 line number that parents can call at any time to that

1 hot line number with any problem or just general  
2 information.

3 For example, if they want to know about adult  
4 education, if they want to know other things, programs  
5 that are available to them in the city, and it's also  
6 used when there are problems with youngsters, and we  
7 try then to guide them to the proper person who can  
8 then take care of that.

9 So, we're looking ahead to a lot of changes  
10 with our new superintendent, who should be on board  
11 July 1st, and as one of the major requirements, as I  
12 told you, was that this person would be a person who  
13 would focus in on student achievement for our  
14 youngsters, a person who has a proven record.

15 We asked for an established and experienced  
16 superintendent. This is not a time for us to be  
17 breaking in someone, and we wanted someone who has a  
18 proven record in raising standards for youngsters.

19 So, I'm very optimistic. We have -- we're  
20 just about at the point now where we expect to be  
21 naming that superintendent, and I'm very optimistic  
22 that we will move ahead in the year 2000.

23 One additional thing I want to say. In the  
24 selection of the superintendent, I think the community  
25 feels very good about what it has done. For the first

1 time, the community was directly involved in the  
2 selection of the superintendent.

3 27 community groups were a part of the  
4 advisory team. They then selected three  
5 representatives who sat in on the whole process. They  
6 came to the interviews. They asked better questions  
7 than the professionals did, and they had a lot to  
8 contribute to just who they thought would be a good  
9 superintendent for their youngsters.

10 All of them happened to be parents. I think  
11 the group was very wise. The group was a very broad  
12 group. It had community people, people in the health  
13 field, people in many areas of the community, but they  
14 were very careful to select for the representatives who  
15 worked with us closely three parents, and they did a  
16 tremendous job.

17 So that when our new superintendent comes in,  
18 he or she knows that they have the complete support of  
19 the community, and that just bodes well for us, that  
20 the community will support that superintendent, who we  
21 expect to come in and set some very high standards and  
22 do a lot to turn around the education in the City of  
23 Bridgeport.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause)

1 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you very much.

2 MR. MACY: Before our next speaker, may I  
3 remind the panel, just like I reminded the first panel,  
4 that even though the -- what their comments are going  
5 to be caught on tape, that we request that they all  
6 provide us, if they could, with written full statements  
7 to revise and extend their remarks, so that we will  
8 have a full record.

9 These -- you have until June 23rd to get  
10 these to us, and if you look at the press release, you  
11 will see at the top the address of the Commission on  
12 Civil Rights. They should be addressed to -- it's the  
13 Eastern Region, and the Director is Dr. Ki-Taek Chun,  
14 C-H-U-N. So, if they're sent to him, we will be able  
15 to incorporate all of the remarks that you wish to make  
16 because having given speeches, I know we sometimes  
17 forget sentences at a time.

18 So, with that in mind, I'd appreciate it.  
19 Thank you.

20 MS. McDUFFIE: Good afternoon.

21 Bridgeport, like many urban areas, has found  
22 itself moving toward the end of the 20th Century with  
23 an eroding economy, a dwindling tax base, and an  
24 emerging diverse population.

25 The shifts in community investment and

1 consumerism took its toll on public services, most  
2 especially public education. As of October 1975, I'm  
3 going to give you a little history about how we might  
4 find ourselves in some of the predicament that we are  
5 today.

6 The racial composition in 1975 of Bridgeport  
7 public schools was 35 percent black, 28 percent  
8 Hispanic, and 37 percent white. In 1975, a number of  
9 schools were treated as "white" schools while others  
10 were treated as "minority" schools. Students were  
11 often assigned to schools based on their race or were  
12 permitted to transfer out of the district.

13 Minority students were often crowded into  
14 older, inadequate schools, rather than being permitted  
15 to attend nearby under-utilized white schools. In the  
16 20 years before parents and communities filed the  
17 school desegregation lawsuit, additions were  
18 constructed to four white schools but to only one  
19 minority school.

20 Minority schools were frequently run on  
21 double sessions, rather than sending minority students  
22 to white schools. Based on such inequities, members of  
23 the Bridgeport community filed a lawsuit. This lawsuit  
24 became known as Crumpton v. Chalk.

25 The lawsuit claimed that the school district

1 denied equal protection to any person who attended  
2 Bridgeport public schools, thusly creating a dual  
3 school district, a non-unitary school district.

4 The court substantiated because of the  
5 overwhelming factors in the case that both parties, the  
6 defendants and the plaintiffs, should enter into a  
7 consent decree because of the unitary district.

8 While there's no -- because it was not a  
9 unitary district, there was a dual district.

10 While there's no precise definition of the  
11 term "unitary", the Supreme Court has stated that until  
12 the court makes a finding that a school district no  
13 longer denies equal protection to any person within the  
14 school system, the system cannot be found to be in  
15 compliance with the commands of the Constitution, and  
16 this is per another case, The Board of Education of  
17 Oklahoma City v. Dial in 1991.

18 So, this is how the court substantiated  
19 whether or not it's a unitary or dual system.

20 In 1968, the Supreme Court discussed the six  
21 criteria to be examined in determining whether a school  
22 system is unitary. In Green v. The County School Board  
23 of New Kent, the court stated racial discrimination  
24 within the county school system extended not just to  
25 the composition of the student body but to every facet

1 of school operations, faculty, staff, transportation,  
2 extracurricular activities, and facility.

3           These six factors were used by the courts in  
4 subsequent decisions in examining whether school  
5 districts afforded equality of opportunity. In 1999,  
6 in another case, Freeman v. Pitts, the court held that  
7 whether or not a school district can be found in  
8 compliance with the Constitution involves the exercise  
9 of the court's discretion and its equity powers. The  
10 term "unitary" does not confine to the discretion of  
11 the court, the district court, in any way that departs  
12 from traditional equity principles.

13           The essence of the court's equity power lies  
14 in its inherent ability to adjust remedies in a  
15 feasible and practical manner, a way to limit  
16 conditions of redress from the injuries caused by  
17 unlawful actions.

18           In other words, the court has decided that  
19 until the district can show that it actually is not  
20 practicing any kind of desegregation that restricts  
21 anybody that's within that district, if one person is  
22 restricted, and then the district is still dual, that  
23 the court -- the district has to be able to show that  
24 everybody has free and equal opportunity, so expressed.

25           In the Board of Education v. Dial, the



1 Supreme Court promulgated a standard for determining  
2 when school desegregation decrees, such as Crumpton v.  
3 Chalk, should be terminated.

4 The court must not simply declare the system  
5 to be unitary, it must additionally make a precise  
6 statement as to whether the school board has met its  
7 obligations under the decree.

8 Now, the City of Bridgeport Board of  
9 Education was under a consent decree which is an  
10 agreement, a kind of a contract, with members of the  
11 community that certain things should be done, and the  
12 court says that we cannot remove that consent decree  
13 until all these things are done, and you've proved that  
14 you are going to be a good district and not going to do  
15 them anymore, that this harm is not going to be  
16 repeated.

17 So, the dissolution of the court decree  
18 occurs where the district court finds that the school  
19 system is being operated in compliance with the equal  
20 protection clause, and that it is unlikely that the  
21 board will return to its former ways.

22 In determining whether or not to dissolve or  
23 modify a court order to desegregate a school system,  
24 the court should look not only to student assignment  
25 but to every facet. The six factors that they came up

1 with before, you have to look at everything, school  
2 operations, faculty, staff, transportation,  
3 extracurricular activities, and facilities. Everything  
4 has to be equitable in order for the court -- and you  
5 also have to -- the district also has to prove that  
6 it's not going to do these bad things again.

7 Also in Crumpton v. Chalk, Crumpton v. Chalk  
8 enjoined the defendants from discriminating in  
9 assigning students to schools, otherwise isolating  
10 students by race, creating or altering the school  
11 district boundaries, transferring students outside of  
12 their district, assigning and hiring in faculty and  
13 staff, allocating resources, for example physical  
14 plant, equipment, materials, availability of courses.

15 Also using tracking system or other grouping  
16 systems or group practices, making available  
17 extracurricular activities or imposing discipline.

18 In order to alter the consent decree, either  
19 in whole or in part, the court must be first satisfied  
20 that the defendants are in compliance with the mandates  
21 of the decree in any area subject to alterations, and  
22 that the defendants will not revert to their former  
23 ways as to that particular portion of that decree. So,  
24 they can't alter any part of it without those things  
25 being in place.

1           In Bridgeport, as of November 1997, the  
2 racial composition was 88.7 percent minority and 11.3  
3 percent non-minority in its public schools. At the  
4 time of the filing of Crumpton v. Chalk, a number of  
5 other situations existed which I explained to you  
6 before.

7           Although these situations do not still exist  
8 at that particular level, racial isolation in  
9 Bridgeport is still a very distressing -- a major  
10 distress. It's of a different nature than in 1975, but  
11 it's as serious and as bad of a situation.

12           The Bridgeport public schools have become  
13 predominant black and Latino. There are 32 schools.  
14 Only six of the 32 elementary and middle schools have  
15 middle school populations that are at least one-quarter  
16 white.

17           Okay. Three of these are magnet schools, and  
18 the magnet schools were created with the intent of  
19 integration. When the magnet schools were developed,  
20 they developed them with such a formula, that they  
21 would be integrated. So, they have white, but nobody -  
22 - none of the schools, none of the six, the six schools  
23 are the higher-achieving schools within the district.  
24 None of those six have more than a quarter -- not even  
25 half of the population is white.

1           So, even the higher-achieving schools that  
2           are integrated to some degree are not heavily  
3           integrated with white students.

4           The six schools that have populations 48 to  
5           24 percent white are Winthrop, High Horizons, Blacken,  
6           Hooker, Multicultural Magnet and Park City Magnet.  
7           Among Bridgeport schools, the three magnet schools and  
8           John Winthrop, at least at the time this was done, had  
9           the highest percentage of the students who met state  
10          testing goals, and this might have shifted a little  
11          bit, but in general that's still true.

12          The 1999 Census of population shows that the  
13          population of Bridgeport is a 141,686, of whom 37,684  
14          are black, 35,840 are Hispanic. The school age 5  
15          through 18 is 35 percent black and 38 percent Hispanic.  
16          Black and Latino are 52 percent of the population of  
17          the city and 73 percent of the school population.

18          60 percent of the white children that live in  
19          Bridgeport attend private schools. So, we do have  
20          white children who live here, but they go to school out  
21          of town for the 60 percent of them.

22          The unavailability of jobs and the economic  
23          resources to many families in Bridgeport means that  
24          private school is not or may not be an option for some  
25          families, especially for the new arrivals and for those

1 who suffer from institutionalized racism.

2 Racial isolation now prevails in Bridgeport  
3 schools. The answer to reducing racial isolation lies  
4 in making Bridgeport schools more attractive to  
5 families of all socioeconomic strata. Until the  
6 quality of education is improved within the Bridgeport  
7 schools, the racial isolation of those schools, of the  
8 six schools, will also simply increase.

9 The Bridgeport Board of Education must  
10 demonstrate a commitment to improving the quality of  
11 education in Bridgeport, thusly eliminating the dual  
12 system.

13 Recommendations for equity. There are  
14 disparities between the resources and the schools which  
15 is largely considered a lack of minority students. My  
16 time's up?

17 MR. MACY: Two more minutes.

18 MS. McDUFFIE: Okay. All right. There are  
19 some disparities within the six schools as opposed to  
20 the other schools in the system. The six schools have  
21 more resources in terms of counselors. They have  
22 certified library staff. The computers -- they have --  
23 their percentage of racial student to computer is  
24 higher than the district average. Some of the -- in  
25 terms of facility and arts rooms, some of them have

1 four arts classrooms, wherein the other 16 schools have  
2 -- some of them have none or they're about the same.

3 The buildings, Mrs. Geter mentioned the  
4 buildings. Yes, they are being renovated, but we're  
5 still in dire straits. The buildings have some things  
6 that OSHA needs to deal with in terms of health and  
7 safety hazards to kids.

8 The hiring practices of the district. The  
9 court had demanded that in 1980, that the district hire  
10 according to the labor market area percentages, black  
11 and Latinos, into the Bridgeport school system. The  
12 labor market statistic for this area is 34 percent.  
13 Bridgeport hired up at one point to a level of 28  
14 percent, and that regressed and now is 25.9 percent  
15 now.

16 They've never reached what the court has  
17 asked them to do in terms of hiring practices of staff.  
18 There's a problem of transferring -- they have various  
19 programs now, the Project Choice Program, the Regional  
20 Schools. All these programs need to be watched because  
21 according to the lawsuit, they're really not supposed  
22 to do -- take any steps without consulting that consent  
23 decree.

24 The consent decree should be on the table at  
25 every board meeting. That should be like the Bible for



1 I'd like to just take two seconds to say why all of  
2 this is important to me.

3 Two reasons. One's selfish and one's not  
4 selfish. My selfish reason for caring about the  
5 quality of education in Bridgeport in the year 2000 are  
6 my children. I have four children in our schools. I  
7 can afford to send them to private or parochial school,  
8 but I choose to send them to public school in  
9 Bridgeport because I believe in public schools. I  
10 believe my children are getting a fine education in  
11 Bridgeport. If they were not, I'd pull them out.

12 I'm not going to play with their future by  
13 turning them over to people who are unqualified.  
14 That's my selfish reason for being here and for caring  
15 about education.

16 My unselfish reason is that I care about all  
17 of our children because I firmly believe from the  
18 bottom of my heart that public education is the only  
19 way that children from communities like ours can  
20 succeed in life and make their dreams come true.

21 It was true when my parents told me that. It  
22 remains true today. What we have to do, those of us  
23 who are adults, is make sure that the resources are  
24 there so that our children's dreams can come true.

25 With respect to the state of education today,



1 I think we have to begin by saying that a venue like  
2 this and an event like this, of course, focuses on  
3 those things that need to be improved, and that's  
4 healthy, that's right, that's appropriate, but we  
5 should not miss the opportunity to stop and note our  
6 successes.

7 We do have many, many talented, dedicated  
8 staff who are working quite hard every day. We have  
9 many dedicated parents who work 1-2-3 jobs and still  
10 find time to work with your children. We have students  
11 who are excelling beautifully.

12 In a few weeks, Central High School is going  
13 to graduate a class where, for the first time, I think,  
14 in the school's history, not one but two students have  
15 been admitted to Harvard. We have students admitted to  
16 Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Boston College,  
17 some of the finest institutions in this country. We  
18 should not lose sight of that fact.

19 However, we do have multiple systems within  
20 the same city. We have a system that works very well  
21 for those students who come to school prepared to learn  
22 because by the grace of God, they come to school from a  
23 family that has resources, who are reliable parents, or  
24 other adults that care about them, but we have many,  
25 many other students, thousands of students, who come to

1 school, unfortunately, unprepared to succeed. We can't  
2 rest until that group of students is doing as well as  
3 the first group of students.

4 Getting a little bit more specific, we have  
5 very specific problems that we have to fix once and for  
6 all. Number 1. Our class sizes are by and large too  
7 large. It is unfair to ask a professional to teach a  
8 group of 30 or 32 students, even 28. We have to bring  
9 class sizes down.

10 With respect to technology, which has been  
11 discussed here by Ms. McKenzie-Wharton and others, we  
12 need to do a better job of making sure that the  
13 technology we purchase or lease remains in good  
14 operating condition, and that after that, professionals  
15 are trained appropriately to use it.

16 It makes no sense to spend \$5-10-15 million  
17 on computer boxes, hook them up to an outlet, and then  
18 just leave them there. We need to integrate that into  
19 the curriculum.

20 Finally, very, very basic issues that are  
21 important for any organization, whether you're talking  
22 about a business, a family, a church or a school  
23 district, have to be on it. What are those principles?  
24 Accountability and respect.

25 When a principal notices that a window is

1 broken in the school building and calls the maintenance  
2 department to get that window fixed, the window has to  
3 be fixed in a reasonable period of time. That's  
4 accountability. If it's not fixed, then the district  
5 has to take appropriate action against whomever failed.

6 Second. Respect. For me, that's the one  
7 word that can frankly wrap itself around all of our  
8 issues, all of our challenges, and all of our hope.

9 Every person is entitled to respect in our  
10 district. Every child's potential has to be respected.  
11 Every parent has to be welcomed into a school building  
12 with respect. Children have to be taught that they  
13 have to respect their teachers. Their teachers cannot  
14 be abused.

15 Principals have to learn that -- principals  
16 have to understand that the administration downtown is  
17 going to respect their input and not simply command  
18 from up above.

19 Moving on to very specific comments that I  
20 would like to share with you today, I'd like to begin  
21 with what I consider one of the most important.  
22 Without any question, without any doubt whatsoever, the  
23 City of Bridgeport simply does not invest enough money  
24 in its public school system.

25 Bridgeport ranks 167th out of 169 Connecticut

1 towns in terms of the percentage of the school budget  
2 that is contributed by local tax dollars. That is  
3 nothing less than shameful. Most of our monies that we  
4 spend on education come from federal or state  
5 resources.

6 Our administration and our city council year-  
7 in and year-out gives the Board of Education only the  
8 minimum required by state law and not a dollar more.  
9 You can't expect to fix some of these problems without  
10 an investment of dollars.

11 Next. We've discussed how we are  
12 transitioning into a new era. We're concluding an era  
13 now that lasted for a long time and that left many of  
14 us unhappy. In my personal opinion, we had a climate  
15 in the district of fear and suppression. People  
16 weren't encouraged to be creative or to speak up.  
17 Principals were told to basically follow the chain of  
18 command.

19 We have to have a climate where creativity  
20 and initiatives are going to be rewarded, where  
21 principals are going to be encouraged to come up with  
22 new ideas. They may not all work, but we want to see  
23 principals trying new things, and they're not going to  
24 be punished for it.

25 We want parents to speak up when there's a

1       problem. We want teachers to be treated as  
2       professionals. We all know that those who serve our  
3       country in uniform earn the country's respect and  
4       gratitude and can forever proclaim that I served.

5               Well, frankly, in my opinion, people who  
6       dedicate their life to teaching serve our country.  
7       It's in the public schools, especially in our urban  
8       public schools, where we take kids from all over the  
9       world. We throw them together, and we say this is  
10      where we're going to teach you to be good Americans.  
11      This is where we're going to teach you to respect each  
12      other, and hopefully along the way, we're going to  
13      teach you how to read, write and do arithmetic, and  
14      you're going to go on and hopefully help your family  
15      lift itself up by its bootstraps.

16             Very small example. Five-six years ago, this  
17      country was bombing certain parts of Iraq. People were  
18      fleeing. Fast forward five years later, in our  
19      Maplewood School District, we have 20-25 children from  
20      that ethnic group who all of a sudden showed up on our  
21      shores. Don't speak English, speak a language we've  
22      never seen before in our district, and they say educate  
23      us.

24             That's our job. We welcome them. Public  
25      schools are not like private schools. We don't pick

1 and choose. We don't have the right to turn away  
2 children, and we never would want to. We welcome all  
3 of the children from wherever in the world they may  
4 come, but we can't do the job right unless we have the  
5 resources with which to do the job.

6 Next. Mrs. Geter mentioned the process that  
7 was used to pick the new superintendent. It was a very  
8 healthy process. It was an open process, and community  
9 organizations were invited in and participated  
10 meaningfully and respectfully. It was mutually  
11 beneficial to the Board and to the community. That  
12 process has to begin.

13 One specific example. Right now, we have one  
14 board member who's about to leave the city. Under  
15 state law, the Board of Education fills that vacancy.  
16 I'm hopeful that we follow the same type of open and  
17 inclusive process to fill that chair that we followed  
18 to fill the superintendent's chair, that we solicit  
19 community input, and that we allow qualified people to  
20 offer their names for the seat, and that we let  
21 everyone see how we make that decision.

22 The decision should not be made behind closed  
23 doors, based on the political agendas of one political  
24 party or another, and, frankly, ladies and gentlemen,  
25 for too long, decisions in Bridgeport that impact

1 children in the school system have been made based on  
2 political considerations and not educational  
3 imperatives. That has to stop, and the selection of  
4 the new board member is a good place to show that these  
5 new inclusive healthy habits we have are going to stay,  
6 and we're not going to go back to the bad old days of  
7 doing business behind closed doors.

8 Literacy is the key to all learning. I think  
9 our city has to come together and launch a  
10 comprehensive literacy campaign throughout the city,  
11 not just in the schools. We have to reach out to the  
12 hair salons, to the houses of worship, to the bowling  
13 alleys, wherever people may congregate, and reach those  
14 adults who themselves cannot read, because if we can  
15 improve their abilities and foster a love for reading  
16 among the adults in our community, we can provide our  
17 children with a greater number of adult supervisors and  
18 mentors.

19 Throughout the district, we have to raise  
20 expectations for our students and our teachers.  
21 Nothing is more debilitating than to let a child know  
22 that you have low expectations for her or him.

23 In 1972, I transferred from one elementary  
24 school in this city to another. The first one had a  
25 large percentage of Latino children. I am proud to be

1 Puerto Rican. The second school did not.

2 When I arrived at the second school, it was  
3 clear to me that the teacher to whom I was assigned did  
4 not expect very much from me, notwithstanding the fact  
5 that I had been an A student at my first school. She  
6 saw my name, she saw my face, and she had expectations  
7 from me that were lower than the teachers in the first  
8 school.

9 I was in that second school for only half a  
10 year, but I will tell you, I took those few months off.  
11 I gave her what she expected from me. No more. In the  
12 first school, I worked my tail off because they  
13 expected so much more from me. That's happening too  
14 often with our children.

15 We cannot employ individuals who believe that  
16 our children can be allowed to graduate with only  
17 minimal standards of excellence because they come from  
18 poor families or because they speak a different  
19 language or because they don't have a lot of money. We  
20 have to have the same expectations for our students  
21 here in Bridgeport that other communities have for  
22 theirs. The challenges that face us in meeting that  
23 should not be turned into excuses.

24 An issue dear to my heart is the attack that  
25 is underway at the state level on bilingual education.



1 Mary was talking about a meeting we attended last  
2 night. One small example.

3 When assessing reading ability, the State of  
4 Connecticut actually requires that students who have  
5 arrived at this district only months before the test is  
6 to be given to take the test only in English.

7 Our example last night was a large school in  
8 Bridgeport that has a significant Portuguese  
9 population. A child who's fresh here from Portugal,  
10 who doesn't speak English, and who's never gone to  
11 school in an English-speaking country, is given this  
12 test in English and is not given an English  
13 translation.

14 In fact, it's even worse than that. The  
15 State of Connecticut does not even own a Portuguese  
16 translation of the test. There is absolutely no  
17 ability to test that child's reading ability in her  
18 native language. They do have such translations in  
19 other languages, including Spanish.

20 Well, frankly, that's nothing less than  
21 cruelty. I mean, if I were to come into this room and  
22 place a document written in Yiddish in front of my  
23 friend George Mintz and say read this, and he couldn't  
24 read a word, and then I'd slap the label on his  
25 forehead that said reading deficient, as we are now

1 slapping on some of our children, all of you would call  
2 me crazy, but we are doing this in Connecticut to  
3 children who come to us speaking a language other than  
4 English. That's outrageous. That's a violation of  
5 those students' civil rights, in my opinion.

6 One large area that hasn't been touched upon  
7 yet but may be by other speakers is our special  
8 education services.

9 All across the country, special education  
10 soaks up a huge percentage of the local board's budget.  
11 It is a critically-important area. We need to continue  
12 our efforts to revamp that area. We have made  
13 substantial progress in the last couple of years in  
14 changing the way we offer special education services to  
15 the kids of Bridgeport who need it, but we're not where  
16 we should be.

17 Special ed. classes are still too large.  
18 Special ed. services are still too slow in being  
19 offered to parents of children who need them, and very  
20 often, these are the parents and children most in need  
21 of a helping hand from the district.

22 In conclusion, I want to go back to where I  
23 began. We have some terrific teachers. We have some  
24 terrific principals and students, and we have some  
25 terrific people in the community who, even without

1 having any children in our schools, come to our  
2 meetings and offer their labor and their time.

3 If we continue the efforts that we've begun  
4 over the last several months to run a more open and  
5 honest and democratic system, I am confident that we  
6 can meet these objectives, if we're provided with the  
7 resources with which to do the job.

8 Our city has to be told that it has to spend  
9 more money on education. That is the single biggest  
10 obstacle to achieving our objectives, and the second  
11 biggest obstacle is the lower-than-appropriate  
12 expectations that too many people have for our  
13 children.

14 If we spend the money and raise the  
15 expectations, we can achieve and we can have a school  
16 district that we can be proud of, not just a school  
17 here or a student body there or these students over  
18 there, but an entire district.

19 I want to thank everyone for their patience.  
20 Thank you.

21 (Applause)

22 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you, Mr. Medina.  
23 Mr. Mintz?

24 MR. MINTZ: I would like to thank whomever's  
25 responsible for allowing me to take a part in this very

1 worthwhile discussion on how the future of our city  
2 unfolds.

3 I do believe that the City of Bridgeport will  
4 be a city that we will all be very proud of in the  
5 years to come, and I agree with Max that our school  
6 system will also be a school system that we will all be  
7 very proud of.

8 But in its present mode, Bridgeport is a tale  
9 of two cities, the haves and the have-nots. The haves  
10 are defined as the more educated, the more economically  
11 advantaged, the more learned, and that trickles down to  
12 the type of students that their children eventually  
13 become. It also affects the type of school that their  
14 children attend.

15 Earlier today, we talked about media coverage  
16 and what type of coverage the City of Bridgeport  
17 receives from the media. The media's not interested in  
18 telling the tale of the good city. Media's interested  
19 in telling the tale of the bad city.

20 Same thing applies with the school system.  
21 Very rarely do you see a lot of fanfare being given  
22 concerning the good things that we do within our school  
23 system.

24 I'm very proud to be the PTSO president at  
25 Central High School, because at Central High School, we

1 have many, many, many successes, but we also have many,  
2 many, many failures.

3 There are several areas that I'm going to  
4 delete from my talk because they have been covered by  
5 other members of the panel, but I'm just going to  
6 revisit just a few of them.

7 When my daughter was in elementary school,  
8 she was in a classroom with students who were high  
9 achievers and low achievers. When she went from  
10 elementary to what is called middle school, she was  
11 placed in the second highest group in the school, but  
12 all of her friends whom she had been with was placed in  
13 the highest group, but these were some of the same  
14 students whom my daughter helped with their homework.

15 At that time, I was somewhat naive as to how  
16 the system worked, but I'm raising that as an example  
17 to talk about what our challenges are as we go into the  
18 millennium.

19 We have a lot of programs in place that will  
20 address student achievement, and I'm confident that  
21 when these programs are completed, we will have made a  
22 major hurdle in the overall achievement of all of our  
23 students.

24 But my concern and what I'm going to focus  
25 mostly on are the students that we leave behind.

1 School systems today are being asked to solve a number  
2 of problems that I don't feel that our teachers have  
3 been prepared to fulfill.

4 How many of our teachers coming out of  
5 college not having been prepared to work in an urban  
6 environment is prepared to deal with the type of issues  
7 that they are confronted with on a daily basis?

8 We talk about parent involvement and how we  
9 want to increase the parent involvement within the  
10 schools, but I think we need to concentrate, and one of  
11 the challenges that's going to face the Board of  
12 Education as we go forward, even with under the  
13 direction of a new superintendent, is not so much the  
14 parent advocate but the child advocate.

15 I sat in a meeting last week where the state,  
16 not the city, but the state has come out with some very  
17 rigorous promotion policies that they would like to  
18 employ within the district, and those policies pretty  
19 much state that if a child does not achieve at the  
20 level that is mandated by the state, even though there  
21 are some specific guidelines that can be used to  
22 override it, that those children will be held back.

23 I'm extremely concerned about the state  
24 mandating these policies within our school district and  
25 not taking into consideration that Bridgeport, while we

1 are making many steps forward, those type of mandated  
2 policies is going to cause us to take some steps  
3 backwards.

4 Statistics show that children who are held  
5 back in the primary grades, second, third and fourth  
6 grade, are four times as likely to drop out of school.  
7 Why then, if a city such as ours, who is struggling to  
8 regain its position in the marketplace in terms of test  
9 scores and student achievement, why then would the  
10 state implement such a policy that is certainly going  
11 to be detrimental to our children?

12 A lady in the room stood up at the meeting  
13 where the promotion policies were discussed and said,  
14 "If the parents of these children do not take an active  
15 role in their child's education, then we have to blame  
16 the parent." I find that alarming.

17 If a child goes to a movie theater, there's a  
18 sign there that says do not let this child in because  
19 this show or this story is not suitable for children  
20 that age, if a child gets in trouble with the law, the  
21 law holds the parents accountable, but yet we are  
22 asking a school system through no fault of the child to  
23 hold that child responsible when that child may or may  
24 not have a responsible parent.

25 Is it something that the school district can

1 solve? Can we produce the type of programs for parent  
2 involvement that will address the needs of the children  
3 whose parents perhaps don't care?

4 When you live in a city where economically  
5 the income level of people are distressed, where  
6 parents work two and three jobs, and where children are  
7 pretty much latchkey, and sometimes do not have any  
8 supervision, is it fair to put the burden of proof upon  
9 the child?

10 I think that one of the things that the  
11 district needs to take a very serious look at, and I  
12 know that there are plans to do so, but we must train  
13 and provide the type of training in this district that  
14 teachers -- that allow our teachers to understand the  
15 complexities that face some of these children who come  
16 to school daily.

17 Some of our children who come to school may  
18 not have had the opportunity for a good night's sleep.  
19 Some of our children who come to school may not have  
20 had a breakfast, but yet we're holding them to  
21 standards beyond their control.

22 MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Mintz, with all due  
23 respect, if you could summarize in the next two  
24 minutes, we'd appreciate it. Thank you.

25 MR. MINTZ: I was waiting for that little



1 bell.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Well, we don't know how to  
3 operate it.

4 MR. MINTZ: Okay.

5 MR. JOHNSON: So, we're back to the manual  
6 system here.

7 MR. MINTZ: I guess I talked longer than I  
8 thought I was. I thought I was at five minutes.

9 But the areas that I know that the school  
10 district will be concentrating on going forward as  
11 Nancy and Max indicated earlier, the superintendent  
12 search was a good process. We got a chance to have  
13 input in it, and we also heard from the candidates, and  
14 all of the issues that I was going to subsequently  
15 address, I feel very confident will be addressed by the  
16 new superintendent, and that is, the dropout rate  
17 within our city is extremely too high.

18 While we have made tremendous strides in  
19 reducing the dropout rate, it is still too high. The -  
20 - we talk about class size being too large. I was  
21 never so happy to have each of the candidates for  
22 superintendent come to Central and talk about the fact  
23 that the school size was also too large.

24 And then, lastly, dealing with another issue  
25 that I'm happy to say that a grant was just approved

1 that will address some of the concerns that we have in  
2 a large environment.

3 In Central High School, we have 2,000 kids.  
4 There's a percentage of our kids there who fall through  
5 the crack, and they number some place about five  
6 percent of the student population. The parents of  
7 Central have asked and the administration have answered  
8 positively that more will be done to formulate  
9 programs, to create schools within a school, so that  
10 our children do not drop out of an institution of  
11 learning and go into a legal system where they do learn  
12 but under stress and duress.

13 I'd like to say that the involvement of  
14 parents in the life of children within this city, and I  
15 think I speak for the parents of this city, the parents  
16 are doing as much as they know how to do. There is no  
17 parent in any school system in any city in America that  
18 does not want the best for his or her child, and I  
19 would ask that the people who work in the school  
20 system, if a directive -- I think it would serve our  
21 city well if the Board of Education in on-going  
22 meetings would establish the sensitivity of sometimes  
23 teachers and administrators from making statements that  
24 parents do not care or that parents are not involved,  
25 because parental involvement doesn't necessarily

1 require you to come to the school.

2 Different levels of learning and different  
3 cultures have different ways of parental involvement,  
4 and I think that that's a stigma that we need to rid  
5 ourselves of because all parents care about their  
6 children.

7 Thank you.

8 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you very much,  
9 Mr. Mintz.

10 (Applause)

11 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Mr. Reinoso?

12 MR. REINOSO: Ladies and gentlemen, good  
13 afternoon. My name is Felipe Reinoso. I'm a resident  
14 of the City of Bridgeport for the last 31 years.

15 In my life, in this great city, Bridgeport,  
16 as an immigrant from Peru, I have to tell you that I  
17 enjoy so much and learn so much through the guidance,  
18 help, support of many, many individuals.

19 I embraced this career based on needs that I  
20 observed early in the '70s. The dropout rate in those  
21 days was almost 40 percent. That was unacceptable, and  
22 it's still high. We make a lot of improvement.  
23 There's a lot of improvement now that I observe in the  
24 city, but I think there is more that we should do.

25 When I say we, it's also my responsibility,

1 it's not only the Board of Education, it's not only  
2 parents, it's also the city officials, parents, so on,  
3 so forth.

4 As I mentioned to you that I came from Peru,  
5 I have to tell you that to me, it's very disappointing  
6 to see this room without the proper representation of  
7 the city. We have a number of people, immigrants,  
8 coming from Central and South America, Mexico, arriving  
9 and contributing to this country and to this city, and  
10 also I'm surprised, and I'm bringing it to your  
11 attention, the lack of materials in Spanish, since that  
12 that is a major language that we speak here in this  
13 city.

14 Today, there was one incident in our school -  
15 - not today. A couple of days ago. Unfortunately, a  
16 parent of one of my kids passed away. But this is  
17 nothing new. Out of every four kids, one at least  
18 encounters this tragic circumstance. Shootouts,  
19 parents dying at an early age, and for many reasons.

20 We have been faced with a lot of problems,  
21 especially in areas like in Bridgeport, poverty is one  
22 of the major issues. I can tell you, out of the 88  
23 percent that my colleague mentioned of Latino and  
24 African Americans in our system, at least 62 percent,  
25 62 percent of our parents are living under poverty

1 level. 62 percent, which means less than \$30,000 a  
2 year.

3 This is unacceptable again because poverty  
4 breeds a lot of issues at home. Parents neglect their  
5 kids. The city neglects the kids. Kids are being  
6 abused. Malnutrition is all over. The mental  
7 facilities, the mental abilities for the little ones  
8 don't go. They don't develop the potentials. It's our  
9 responsibility.

10 I'd like to also address another scenario  
11 that I'd like to mention to you. It happened to me a  
12 few years ago. I was in the school early in the  
13 morning, 7:30, and passing by, saying hello to my  
14 colleagues, good morning, so on and so forth.

15 In my culture, we respond. The most  
16 elemental and basic thing is respect -- somebody said  
17 respect and dignity. Come on. Two professionals.  
18 Now, several times, good morning, no response, and this  
19 is between two professionals.

20 Ladies and gentlemen, imagine this teacher in  
21 the classroom with 25-30 kids and closing the door.  
22 What is happening there? What is it? What's going on  
23 probably in that room? That hurts.

24 Probably that is one of the reasons why we  
25 got involved. We are still involved in our culture.

1 Again, from the beginning, I said I have great respect  
2 for a lot of the leaders that are in this room, and we  
3 should continue.

4 Also in terms of teachers in our city, out of  
5 the 1,400 teachers in this city, only 25 percent are  
6 minorities. Ladies and gentlemen, that doesn't  
7 represent the student population. We need role models  
8 in our schools. We need teachers, administrators. We  
9 need to bring students, future teachers. We need to  
10 retain. We need to promote, and we need to be absent.

11 Put the political agenda on one side, aside,  
12 and really work with the kids. Now, working and  
13 dealing with kids every day in Bridgeport, my  
14 colleagues probably know, it's very difficult to fool a  
15 kid. They know exactly.

16 I asked my kids, listen, I give you an extra  
17 grade if you show up to the meeting at the Holiday Inn  
18 this afternoon. You don't see any. You don't see any.  
19 Why? Because there's a lack of information. We do not  
20 provide the proper information to parents, students,  
21 since they're little ones.

22 I ask them to write for me statements. I  
23 have them with me. That is something that really  
24 bothers me because this great country's based on the  
25 best democracy, people's participation, and when you

1 invite kid and families, and you don't see them, it  
2 really, really is -- even the national security of the  
3 country is at risk, I can say, if we don't participate,  
4 if we do not invite people to agree or disagree.  
5 Sometimes to disagree is healthy.

6 In terms of the teachers again, in the City  
7 of Bridgeport, we have a number of colleagues who stay  
8 in the city for one year or two, and then they leave.  
9 Many reasons. But also I have to bring this to you,  
10 that in the City of Bridgeport, in the surrounding  
11 towns, Bridgeport has the lowest salaries, living in a  
12 country where its base is based on economy and capital.  
13 People, young people have to move and have to do what  
14 they need to do, buy a house, marry, and so on and so  
15 forth.

16 Young people move out of this area. Young  
17 people making, after seven or eight years of college,  
18 \$40,000 plus. Now, if you were five minutes from  
19 Bridgeport, a teacher is making 50,000.

20 Another five minutes? Trumbull, they're  
21 making 47,000. Just to give an example.

22 In speaking of teachers, I like to bring this  
23 to the Commission, a concern that I have early in the -  
24 - at the beginning of the school year. The school  
25 year, according to my research, started with less than

1 36 teachers that were supposed to be a class.

2 If we multiply 35 teachers plus times 25 the  
3 students in each class, we're talking about 900  
4 students without teachers. Now, who was taking care of  
5 these kids at the beginning, setting the tone and  
6 obviously motivating kids to stay?

7 In our city, most of the kids, most of my  
8 kids, and I say my kids, educators and education, it's  
9 probably the last hope. They're expecting -- they're  
10 waiting for us to expand so we can extend our hands,  
11 and that's the only way, the only decent way, and they  
12 know that, that they can move on.

13 That is a concern that I bring to you, and my  
14 colleagues already covered, but in terms of facilities,  
15 again there are 26 public school buildings. Three are  
16 more than 50 years old, and five are over a hundred  
17 years old.

18 In some of these buildings, old buildings,  
19 special ed. kids are being taught in the basements, in  
20 halls, in areas with not -- they're not conditioned to  
21 have the tranquility and the peace and the environment,  
22 the right environment for a young kid to be tested.

23 I'd like to also conclude in some issues that  
24 my kids mentioned, and I promised them that I would  
25 bring this to you. Crime in most of the inner cities



1 is very high between 3 and 6 p.m. There is a need for  
2 extracurricular activities. There's a need for after-  
3 school programs, summer programs. .

4 I remember, and I can tell you that in  
5 teaching for 11 years, I developed a program myself,  
6 and some individuals in the city do not -- they didn't  
7 believe that working and helping our kids can help the  
8 city, help the business sector, so on and so forth.

9 95 percent of those kids are in college, but  
10 I have to go on my knees many times for resources.  
11 Eventually, we developed the program. We continue, and  
12 we accomplish. Many institutions, and I'd like also to  
13 bring this to the attention of the Commission,  
14 excellent reports, beautiful proposals, with excellent  
15 pictures and so on and so forth.

16 Bottom line, kids play basketball in the  
17 programs or simply drawing, whatever they please, and  
18 exercising and doing exactly what they propose in the  
19 books.

20 So, maybe program directors, principals, and  
21 professionals should be retrained in understanding the  
22 responsibility that they have. Someone said  
23 accountability. Obviously they should be accountable  
24 for that.

25 I'd like to summarize the statements of my

1 kids in terms of what they -- what is it that they  
2 need? They'd like to see again more extracurriculum  
3 activities, especially from 3 to 6. They'd like to see  
4 more intensive programs in computers. They'd like to  
5 see better sanitation in health services. They're  
6 concerned about the homeless.

7 We took the students over to the shelters in  
8 the area, and they found that there are people living  
9 under those conditions, and they're very concerned.  
10 They need scholarships. They need funding, grants,  
11 possibilities to attend, and those -- at this point,  
12 I'd like to also mention this, that I'm a little  
13 disappointed with the institutions of higher education.

14 Sacred Heart University, University of  
15 Bridgeport, and Fairfield University. Those are my  
16 schools that I attended, but the efforts to attain, to  
17 bring and retain the students from our city has been a  
18 little -- to stay a little bit in the elite and  
19 contribute to the city.

20 I think that's not appropriate. We do not  
21 like the consequences of that. I think we as leaders,  
22 members, those that are going to stay in Bridgeport, we  
23 should address this to the institutions of higher ed.

24 Again, 68 percent of our kids are living  
25 under poverty. How can they make \$25,000 a year?

1 Impossible. So, there's got to be a way to promote our  
2 children.

3 Another issue is self-esteem. They were  
4 concerned about that, and again talking about self-  
5 esteem, they mentioned that they would like to see more  
6 people that reflect their culture, their ethnicity.

7 Recreation centers. Facilities for disabled  
8 kids in all forms, and better facilities and employment  
9 for youth, more homework. Okay.

10 I'd like to end my remarks and my concerns  
11 that I have. Again, I'm very optimistic about this  
12 city. I think we can do more. We have to unite and  
13 see what we can do. I'd like to see also students  
14 being part of the discussion.

15 If we can invite juniors and seniors maybe  
16 and hear from them. What's going on? I'd like to end  
17 with three statements that we made in class. We'd like  
18 to see more books and less arsenals, more learning and  
19 less buys, more justice and less retention.

20 Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

21 (Applause)

22 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you very much.

23 I would hope at this time we would open up  
24 the floor to questions. We're a little limited on  
25 time. I would appreciate maybe if our own people here

1 would let people in the audience have the first  
2 opportunity to ask questions, and when they do come up,  
3 could you address your question from the podium and  
4 state your name first?

5 AUDIENCE: I have a question I'd like to ask  
6 Mrs. Geter.

7 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Sure. Could you come  
8 right on up? State your name first.

9 AUDIENCE: Laurayne Farrar-James, and I am a  
10 member of Action Team.

11 You indicated that the primary goal for the  
12 Board of Education for children in the public school  
13 system here in Bridgeport is to improve their ability  
14 to make greater achievement, and one of the things that  
15 you indicated that is happening is that we have a new  
16 chief of the schools coming on board.

17 My question to you is, would you like to make  
18 that announcement today?

19 MS. GETER: I'm taking the Fifth Amendment on  
20 that one. I'm not at liberty to divulge that. Sorry.

21 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Anyone else out in the  
22 audience? Would you like to have the opportunity?  
23 Come right on up. Okay. Just say your name first.

24 AUDIENCE: My name's Craig Kelly, and just  
25 wanted to more or less piggyback in terms of what Max

1 Medina had indicated in terms of resources for the  
2 city.

3 I have two children that came through the  
4 Bridgeport public school system. Both my sons are  
5 college graduates. One of my sons graduated from  
6 Virginia Union University, which is in Richmond, and is  
7 currently in a Master's-Ph.D. Program at the Virginia  
8 Commonwealth University in psychology.

9 I have another son that graduated from  
10 Dartmouth, but in coming out of -- and currently is in  
11 medical school at the University of St. Louis Medical  
12 School, but coming out of Vassick High School, he  
13 graduated Number 3 in his class out of approximately  
14 300 kids, 300 and some odd kids, but the point I'm  
15 making here is that although he did well in high  
16 school, when he got to Dartmouth, it was a bit of a  
17 struggle for him, in that obviously he was competing  
18 with the brightest of the brightest, but in that sense,  
19 felt that the resources that he received in high school  
20 weren't as adequate as they were for other kids in some  
21 other areas.

22 I'm saying that to say just in terms of what  
23 Max had indicated earlier, is that the Bridgeport  
24 public school system needs more resources, you know.  
25 They need more dollars, and dollars is not a panacea to

1 all the problems that exist in the City of Bridgeport,  
2 but it certainly helps.

3 Although my sons have -- and I'm a single  
4 parent, by the way, you know, and I've raised both of  
5 them by myself, but I think in part that there are  
6 parents out here that clearly want the best for their  
7 children.

8 I look back and when my kids were in grammar  
9 school, I turned around and purchased a computer. I  
10 had my income tax checks in one hand, and I had a bill  
11 in the other, and it was decided -- it was the choice  
12 between either paying the bill or buying a computer. I  
13 bought the computer because I said I'm going to always  
14 have bills, you know, like all of us, you know, and it  
15 was probably one of the best investments I made.

16 They didn't even have computers in the  
17 Bridgeport public school system, and my kids had  
18 computers. So, there are parents and I'm sure there  
19 are parents out there that had the similar story in  
20 terms of when they turned around and made sacrifice for  
21 their children.

22 So, there are parents out there that are  
23 doing the best for their children, both cognitively and  
24 affectively, in terms of their growth and development,  
25 and that's basically it. I don't know if you have any

1 questions of me, but they need more dollars. There  
2 certainly needs to be more empathy in terms of students  
3 and teachers.

4 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you. Thank you  
5 very much. Are there any other questions?

6 AUDIENCE: Good afternoon.

7 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Your name first?

8 AUDIENCE: Good afternoon. My name is Carmen  
9 Perez-Dixon, and I want to commend you all for coming.  
10 The five people on the panel are all friends to  
11 children in Bridgeport. Those who came, they're always  
12 there for the children of Bridgeport.

13 Being a Bridgeport educator, I see the  
14 injustices and the politics running through our  
15 schools. I'm at a school. I believe every parent  
16 sends their child to school and wants the best  
17 education possible for them, but there is an inequity  
18 in supplies, in teachers, and in getting what we need  
19 to run our schools at the principal.

20 Last -- in February, I asked for supplies,  
21 xerox paper and writing paper. You would not believe  
22 what I went through to finally get the paper delivered  
23 to me Monday, two days ago. No paper in the school. I  
24 had to send copies to everyone on the request that I  
25 put in in February, and I said, you know what, I'm not

1 begging for paper. This is a school. We need it.

2           It's just crazy that, I guess we're inner  
3 realm or outer realm. We have maybe 89 percent black  
4 and Latino students. Maybe they don't think they need  
5 paper, but we can do it. Our children are wonderful.  
6 The parents are supportive, and if we just had the  
7 support and that everyone was held accountable, every  
8 teacher, every principal. There are certain staff  
9 members that no matter what they do, they're  
10 untouchable because they're connected.

11           There are certain administrators who can do  
12 whatever they want because they're connected. I'm not  
13 connected, and I have staff members who are, and they  
14 can do almost anything, and I think it's crazy. I  
15 think we're -- we have a great curriculum, but we have  
16 to enforce it.

17           I think if the principals are given the power  
18 to enforce the curriculum and to monitor their staffs,  
19 then it can be done. I think the supplies have to be  
20 passed out with equity. There are six schools that  
21 Mary talked about. I'm sure those principals aren't  
22 begging for paper or books. It shouldn't happen, and I  
23 saw it in abundance in other areas, yet my poor school  
24 goes without.

25           We're also one of the identified schools.



1 Well, unless we get support from top administration and  
2 the supplies we need, we will not get off that hook,  
3 and I think that's very important.

4 We had a presentation last night. We took  
5 parents and children because I believe without forming  
6 a partnership with our parents and our community, so  
7 that they could support and reinforce our high  
8 expectations for students, they're not going to  
9 achieve, and, honestly, I don't feel that that's very  
10 important if we're just cut down to how are the scores  
11 going to improve?

12 We have to do some ground work first. We  
13 have to get that trust with our parents, so they can  
14 see that we want the same for their children, so that  
15 they can achieve, and then we can get the scores up.

16 I think the accountability and inequity,  
17 politics, all that, has to be put in place. Let's put  
18 children and education first, and I, like Max, have  
19 children, too. Unfortunately, I put them in private  
20 school. I'm a product of Bridgeport's schools, and I  
21 thought they were the best, but when I saw what was  
22 happening to my children, no way. No way.

23 If I could get them into one of those six  
24 schools, maybe they'll have a chance, but I have not  
25 been so fortunate. We've been applying for magnet

1 schools for my children since they started  
2 kindergarten, and they just can't get in the loop, and  
3 although I've been a Bridgeport resident, went to  
4 school, and I'm now an administrator, there's no like  
5 let's give the girl a hand. They just don't get in,  
6 and because their mother is an administrator, and I'm  
7 very outspoken because I believe in all children,  
8 especially those in Bridgeport, that my children  
9 sometimes are targeted, and I won't have it.

10 So, they are now in private school. Being a  
11 single parent, it is hurting my pocket, but I know that  
12 I will not let anyone hurt or play with my children's  
13 self-esteem, and I feel that every parent in Bridgeport  
14 wants what I want for my kids, and it's unfair that I  
15 put my kids in private school, and yet there are 22,000  
16 other parents of children who can't do the same.

17 I think we need to offer every child in  
18 Bridgeport an excellent education and the same respect  
19 and trust that was spoken about. We need to offer that  
20 to our parents, and a lot of times, that is not  
21 happening, and I know that the people sitting here feel  
22 the way I feel, but that message has to get out to all  
23 the other ones who are not here.

24 Thank you.

25 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you very much.

1 Are there any other questions in the audience?

2 MR. MACY: I have a question.

3 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Right here.

4 MR. MACY: Yes, I have a question. This is a  
5 comment and a question to the two board members that  
6 are here, Mrs. Geter and Mr. Medina.

7 I came in last night, and I did attend the  
8 board meeting. I guess it was a committee meeting last  
9 night, and I stayed there for about an hour and a half,  
10 and I was very interested.

11 I'm a public -- I was in public school  
12 education myself my whole career, and they brought up  
13 the three schools that are possibly in need of  
14 improvement, and they started off with Beardsley. I  
15 stayed through that entire hearing.

16 What bothered me, I guess, about it is I  
17 looked at some of the material that was passed out.  
18 Here was a school that has a higher attendance record,  
19 a better attendance record, than the average Bridgeport  
20 schools.

21 Here is a school that just fell below the  
22 line, but the thing that astounded me was here was a  
23 school that had the highest class size of any school  
24 that I saw in the community.

25 I've been in public education all my life.

1 Hartford is a smaller city than Bridgeport. Hartford  
2 has 1,800 teachers. If it's accurate, the statement  
3 that Mr. Reinoso made that there are only 1,400  
4 teachers, they have 400 more teachers than you have.

5 The average elementary class size is 22 to 23  
6 students, and all research studies show you can take  
7 paraprofessionals up here. They don't mean a thing.  
8 If you want to -- and the research is all over the  
9 place.

10 If you want to improve the quality of  
11 education, you must bring down class size, not by one  
12 or two, but by a huge number, and the question I have,  
13 which is related to this, is I didn't hear anybody from  
14 administration or the Board make a statement that, yes,  
15 we want to help Beardsley, and what we want to do is  
16 give them a class size that's workable, so that in  
17 fact, changes can be made.

18 Now, has or will anything be done to impact  
19 class size at this school and the other two schools  
20 that are also a little below standard?

21 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. Excuse me. Who  
22 would like to answer that question first?

23 MS. GETER: I don't mind.

24 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay.

25 MR. MEDINA: I'll let Ms. Geter go first.

1 MS. GETER: We are attempting wherever we can  
2 to lower class size. In the K-to-3, our goal is 18  
3 students. Now, we are -- our problem is by the  
4 building program, we do not have the space to put those  
5 extra youngsters.

6 So, what we have done -- one thing we have  
7 done is to have co-teachers. We have two teachers in  
8 the classrooms, certified teachers.

9 MR. MACY: I heard that last night. No. I  
10 heard that last night.

11 MS. GETER: Because we just don't have the  
12 rooms. As we are building new schools, we certainly  
13 hope that we will be able to then further reduce class  
14 sizes, but that is really our problem. We were  
15 overcrowded to begin with.

16 DR. CHUN: I have to jump in here. I hear  
17 something contradictory reach my ear in the late hour  
18 of the day.

19 You yourself acknowledge there's great need  
20 for more teachers, more -- better school facilities and  
21 this and that and all that, and fine, but then I  
22 thought you said earlier, over the years, Bridgeport  
23 Board of Education has been submitting to the City  
24 Council the legally-required minimum budget, did you  
25 not?

1 MR. MEDINA: No. We've been asking for more  
2 money.

3 MS. GETER: We've been asking for more.

4 MR. MEDINA: We haven't been receiving any  
5 more.

6 MS. GETER: What we get is the minimum.

7 DR. CHUN: Oh, you get -- I see.

8 MS. GETER: What we get.

9 DR. CHUN: Then what's the politics of the  
10 City Council to grant the legal minimum in spite of all  
11 these means?

12 MS. GETER: Well, education just isn't the  
13 priority that it should be because certainly if it  
14 were, they would make sure that we got more than the  
15 minimum, and that has been our problem.

16 DR. CHUN: Are the City Council members  
17 elected officials?

18 MS. GETER: Yes, they are.

19 DR. CHUN: And how come they get elected  
20 then?

21 MS. GETER: Well, -- go ahead.

22 MR. MEDINA: That is an excellent question.  
23 Because for too long, our community has let them get  
24 away with it. There is no constituency in the  
25 community strong enough yet to demand changes because

1 they do like getting re-elected.

2           If they knew their re-election hinged on the  
3 Board of Ed budget, they would vote differently, but  
4 they know based on past experience that they can  
5 continue to slap the school system in the face and get  
6 away with it.

7           Many of us are trying to change that. In no  
8 way do I wish to dilute anything we've just said  
9 because it is a fundamental failure on the part of the  
10 City of Bridgeport. If some of those -- but to be  
11 fair, if some of those City Council members were here,  
12 they would say to you, remember, Bridgeport is a city  
13 that made national history with -- national headlines  
14 with an attempted bankruptcy.

15           So, it was kept out of the bond market for  
16 five or six years. So, it could not acquire outside  
17 financing with which to build new schools, and the  
18 percentage of the city's budget that is carried by  
19 residential homeowners as opposed to commercial  
20 taxpayers is higher than the Connecticut average  
21 because, unlike Hartford, we don't have the large  
22 corporations that could carry a bigger piece of the tax  
23 bite.

24           So, they will tell you our local tax rate is  
25 as high as it can possibly be now. I'm a Bridgeport

1 homeowner. I would pay more in taxes if the money was  
2 going to the school system, but the City Council hasn't  
3 voted that way, but the bottom line is, the money  
4 hasn't been there, and without the money, you're right.  
5 All we're doing is nibbling at the edges.

6 We moved 30 kids from one building to  
7 another. So, we dropped the classes from 25 to 24.  
8 But to get from 25 or 28 or God help us in those  
9 buildings where it's 30 or 32, we have to spend serious  
10 money, serious efforts, and Nancy's right. The new  
11 buildings will help, but I guarantee you that unless we  
12 start spending more from year to year to year, three or  
13 four years from now, all those new buildings, God  
14 willing, will be on line, and we will still be crowded.

15 MR. MACY: May I make a suggestion? Do what  
16 they did in Hartford. When they didn't feel they had  
17 the services and supplies, the Board of Education was  
18 dropped, and at the recommendation of the state  
19 commissioner, they put in a board of trustees appointed  
20 by the governor, had the authority to get the money  
21 they needed to get, and all of a sudden, they have  
22 money, SFA, successful for all, is in every damn  
23 school. It's coming out the gazills. But they got the  
24 money to do it because the state demanded that they  
25 spend the money.



1           MR. MEDINA: Well, the state can spend money  
2 without taking away the local citizens' democratically-  
3 elected board. I think that's too high a price to pay,  
4 especially since the money's there.

5           I mean, right now, we're living in the most  
6 robust economy that this country has ever seen. If we  
7 can't find money for public education in this economy,  
8 how bad is it going to be when the downturn comes?

9           MS. GETER: And, you know, this problem just  
10 wasn't started in a day. It's been on-going for years  
11 and years and endemic in the City of Bridgeport. So,  
12 now we're really at the crisis point.

13           MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. Patrick Johnson  
14 has a question.

15           MR. JOHNSON: First of all, a quick comment,  
16 and then, secondly, a question.

17           The comment. I've just been witnessing  
18 what's happening in Bloomfield and Naugatuck when  
19 schools threaten to shut down their athletic programs.  
20 That mobilizes parents rather quickly. Just a quick  
21 comment.

22           The question is, there was reference made --  
23 we've alluded to the dollars that the City Council  
24 controls or the Board of Aldermen here in Bridgeport.  
25 The Board of Education controls certain dollars, and

1       there have been at least a couple of speakers who  
2       referenced an inequity in the distribution of those  
3       dollars among the schools.

4               I'd ask each of the panelists if you're aware  
5       of that inequity, and how that might be addressed.

6               MS. GETER: Of course, a great deal has to do  
7       with magnet schools. When you have a magnet school,  
8       they presume that you're going to put extra resources  
9       in that school in order to attract a better mix of  
10       students.

11               So, you will find that the magnet schools  
12       will have more services, probably smaller classes, than  
13       some of the other schools, and what we have said, and  
14       what our parents have said, is, we want to make every  
15       school in Bridgeport a magnet school, so there will be  
16       equity, so that every school, regardless of whether  
17       it's magnet or not, will receive the same services and  
18       the same pupil-teacher ratio.

19               That is what we are endeavoring to do,  
20       because that has been the policy. If you're a magnet  
21       school, you get all of these different programs. You  
22       get maybe a dance instructor, you know. That type of  
23       thing that goes along with those schools, and, of  
24       course, they get a lot of extra state funding for that.

25               MR. JOHNSON: How many magnet schools are

1       there?

2                   MR. MEDINA: May I just say something before  
3 you ask your follow-up question? Because I'm going to  
4 respectfully disagree with some of what you're saying,  
5 because I don't want to leave them with the wrong  
6 impression.

7                   It's not solely a magnet versus non-magnet  
8 problem because, frankly, when it comes to certain  
9 supplies and assets, the magnet schools get no more  
10 than other schools.

11                   There are differences between our buildings.  
12 Some of them are physical. When you've got a swimming  
13 pool in one building and no swimming pool in the other  
14 building, that's a difference. Do you want to call  
15 that inequity? Sure. That's fine. But that's a  
16 physical difference over which we don't have present  
17 control.

18                   The types of things that Carmen was talking  
19 about, absence of basic supplies, that is not supposed  
20 to happen, and the Board, whenever it asks about  
21 supplies, is assured that we have adequate supplies for  
22 every school building.

23                   So, what is happening is, we go back to  
24 accountability, we have inefficiencies in the system.  
25 I guarantee you for every month that Carmen was on the

1 phone complaining about the absence of the paper, that  
2 paper was sitting in the warehouse downtown, but  
3 somebody wasn't getting off his butt to put it in the  
4 truck to get it to the school building because I know  
5 how much we spend on supplies, and it's there.

6 So, frankly, it's not always a question of  
7 inequity, but actually this makes me feel worse, not  
8 better. If it were just -- if it didn't exist, I would  
9 say we can't invent it, but if it exists, and we're  
10 just not delivering it efficiently, that's ineptitude,  
11 not inequity, and we have a little bit of that.

12 We've got a little bit of inequity, and,  
13 frankly, in some buildings, we have fewer resources  
14 than others because unlike Beardsley that has a very  
15 assertive principle, we need to improve some of our  
16 principals. Some of them are too easy to say okay, I  
17 submitted the requisition, the order has been filled.

18 Well, you know what? If you're the  
19 principal, you're the commander in chief of that  
20 building, and if you're missing something that your  
21 kids need, you should be downtown raising holy hell to  
22 get it.

23 Some of our principals do, some of our  
24 principals don't. So, I just want to say without  
25 disagreeing with anything, yes, some of our differences

1       may be with the magnet program, but that doesn't  
2       explain all of it.

3               We have a bunch of different things that are  
4       feeding into and creating this problem.

5               MR. JOHNSON: Is the Board addressing that  
6       from a policy perspective to improve --

7               MR. MEDINA: Yes.

8               MR. JOHNSON: -- accountability, and could  
9       you elaborate on what steps you are taking?

10              MR. MEDINA: We're replacing people.

11              MS. GETER: And we're also hired a firm to  
12       look into some of these things. There are ways that we  
13       probably could, for example, computerize our supplies,  
14       you know, not just have them laying somewhere in a  
15       warehouse where possibly one or two people decide who  
16       goes where, and having no record that this school  
17       received this, that school received that. So, we're  
18       working on updating our recordkeeping so that we will  
19       have the supplies on computer and know where they are,  
20       who is receiving them, and who is not receiving them,  
21       and then we're able to act on that.

22              MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: I think Ros Berman had  
23       a question first.

24              MS. BERMAN: Yes, I have a question and a  
25       couple of comments.

1           Number 1. I was really pleased to learn that  
2 you are about to institute a parent training program  
3 because I think that's absolutely great and very  
4 essential for kids to have role models at home and  
5 support at home.

6           My question is, do you have any pre-school  
7 programs?

8           MS. GETER: Yes, we have increased our pre-  
9 school program substantially in the past five or six  
10 years. That -- being an early childhood person, I know  
11 how important it is that our children come into  
12 kindergarten with some basic information. They have to  
13 come in and be prepared to accept that kindergarten  
14 curriculum.

15           Many of our youngsters come in and don't have  
16 school language. A simple thing like -- because I was  
17 raised about putting a circle around something. No  
18 one's ever said that to them. Put a circle around  
19 something. These very basic things. They should come  
20 in knowing their colors. Then the kindergarten teacher  
21 can go ahead and teach her curriculum.

22           So, we have expanded -- I think it was like  
23 40 something percent, 48 from memory, of our students  
24 in '96 were getting pre-school education, and I think  
25 it's 68 or something like now, and we are every year

1 adding on to that because we know they must have that  
2 pre-school education. They must have that head start.  
3 That certainly will help us in getting them all.

4 Also, as far as that parent training is  
5 concerned, we're not just starting that. We did -- I  
6 did parent training with parents -- I only meant to be  
7 in 39, but 30 years ago, we did -- what we're going to  
8 do, though, is enlarge that. We're going to really  
9 enlarge that parent training and make it an extremely  
10 important part of what we're doing with kids because we  
11 know that we have to have that partnership thing going.

12 It can't just be the teacher and the child.  
13 It has to be the teacher, the child and the parent, and  
14 because so many parents feel that maybe they cannot  
15 help their youngsters, they'll look to educators to  
16 train those parents and to give them the training they  
17 need to help their youngsters.

18 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you.

19 MR. MEDINA: Every new building will have a  
20 pre-kindergarten.

21 MS. BERMAN: One more question.

22 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: We have to wind down,  
23 too. Go ahead.

24 MR. MACY: Maybe we can have 10 more minutes.

25 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. That's fine.

1 MS. BERMAN: I just wanted to know, does  
2 every school have a music and art program?

3 MS. GETER: Yes, we do. We have music and  
4 art programs for every school. They don't all have the  
5 same facilities. In our new buildings, we are having  
6 rooms designated as art and music rooms and in  
7 sufficient quantities to deal with the youngsters.

8 We've always had art and music, but not the  
9 way it really should be. There should be spaces for  
10 the equipment, spaces for whatever activities they  
11 need, and in all of our new schools, all of them, we  
12 have demanded that we have places for the art rooms  
13 because that's so important.

14 MR. MEDINA: And we don't charge our students  
15 for the instruments. They get students -- they get  
16 instruments free of charge from the district. Last  
17 week, I attended a city-wide spring concert, and I  
18 can't tell you the feeling of pride I had when the  
19 curtain at Central High School pulled back, and there  
20 were over a hundred kids there playing the strings, all  
21 of whom had their instruments free of charge, thanks to  
22 the district, and, frankly, very few of whom had the  
23 money to get private lessons.

24 So, we're the only place where they'll get  
25 it. Now, she's right. It varies again, it varies from



1 building to building. One building will have a large  
2 art class with the easel, another building will have  
3 just a regular classroom where the teacher makes do  
4 with what she can with the art materials.

5 So, we still don't have -- you know, you're  
6 limited across the district, but we've -- we have not  
7 cut the arts from our budget in order to meet and make  
8 ends meet.

9 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. Ki-Taek and  
10 then Patrick.

11 DR. CHUN: I'd like to ask a two-pronged --  
12 two-sided question. The committee has met over the  
13 past few months and met with various groups of  
14 community leaders and concerned citizens, and more than  
15 -- on more than one occasion, we have heard, I  
16 distinctly remember, that there is this problem with  
17 inequitable supply distributions as well as the  
18 attention from the central office to individual  
19 schools, and it was alleged that that disparity or  
20 inequity was not accidental, that it was associated  
21 with race and characteristics of the student population  
22 and the principals.

23 So, there's a strong allegation that it was  
24 racially motivated, intentional disparity, and I would  
25 like you to sort of respond to that.

1           Are you aware of these allegations?  If so,  
2   if -- have you done any investigation in the past?  If  
3   you find such to be the case, what actions can you or  
4   are you willing to take?

5           The other side of the question is -- the  
6   ranking official from the Office for Civil Rights in  
7   the U.S. Department of Education is there.  So, let me  
8   ask that question.

9           There has been allegation or claims have been  
10  made that there are many school facilities that are  
11  substandard, unsafe.  Are they -- do they forward fall  
12  in your jurisdiction, that you can investigate and cite  
13  them for?

14           MR. MACY:  Why don't you come up here, Mr.  
15  Pierce?

16           DR. CHUN:  And if Carmen Perez-Dixon makes a  
17  claim that our school is unsafe, and I think that's  
18  because most of the kids are minority kids, does it  
19  concern you?

20           AUDIENCE:  The answer is yes.  An allegation  
21  that there's a racial basis or disparity in something  
22  as mundane as supply distribution would be something of  
23  interest to the Office for Civil Rights.

24           If we were to find that an allegation of that  
25  nature to be true, it would be a violation of one of

1 our civil rights laws.

2 DR. CHUN: I hope so. Now, that being the  
3 case, has it come to your attention in the past?

4 AUDIENCE: That has not.. As a matter of  
5 fact, in the next panel, I will be here and serving on  
6 the panel and talking about the experience at the  
7 Office for Civil Rights, and one thing that I've noted  
8 that was interesting, I discovered it in the course of  
9 preparing to come, is that we get very few complaints  
10 about Bridgeport, very few, and I was wondering whether  
11 it was related to some of the other discussion that I  
12 heard about the need to do a better job of creating  
13 awareness of who we are and what we do, and I'm  
14 interested in any ideas any of you have about how we  
15 can do a better job of doing that.

16 That's something that does fall within my  
17 area of responsibility, and I did talk with Dr. Chun  
18 about trying to collaborate more with the state  
19 advisory committees, not only in Connecticut but around  
20 New England. I'm from a regional office. So, we have  
21 responsibilities for all six New England states, and we  
22 are trying to find ways to raise the level of awareness  
23 and to make it known who we are, what we do, and how we  
24 might be able to help to resolve some of the problems  
25 that you've been talking about.

1           MR. MACY: Well, we have the president of the  
2 Board here, Mr. Pierce, so that -- and Mr. Medina is a  
3 member of the Board. It might be helpful.

4           AUDIENCE: Great.

5           MR. MEDINA: The answer from my perspective  
6 is that I have never seen any evidence that unevenness  
7 in supplies is due to racial consideration. Never  
8 once. Frankly, I haven't had -- I mean, folks in the  
9 community know that they can come to Nancy and me with  
10 complaints.

11           I haven't received a complaint like that  
12 either. I've received complaints that we're lacking  
13 supplies, but never have I been told it is because we  
14 have a large percentage of minority students.

15           Frankly, the percentage of minority students  
16 at Beardsley is lower than we have at other buildings.

17           MR. MACY: What about the handicapped  
18 children, Mr. Medina? One of the things that we were  
19 told was that the handicapped children who are the ones  
20 that are being --

21           MR. MEDINA: One reason why we're doing this  
22 construction, we're in this construction mode, is  
23 because our old buildings are not up to code and really  
24 cannot be made handicapped accessible without spending  
25 tons of dollars we don't have. So, it's cheaper to

1 just replace them with a new building.

2 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Patrick?

3 MR. JOHNSON: Just a quick question. Earlier  
4 on, Mr. Reinoso had mentioned the teacher who failed to  
5 greet him, his colleague in the building, when he came  
6 in to the building one more.

7 We've also heard allegations that there are  
8 teachers that are "untouchable" because they're so well  
9 connected politically. So that, when you were talking  
10 earlier, Mr. Medina, you mentioned that the principal  
11 should be the commander in chief of their school.

12 If in fact there are teachers in the school  
13 who are untouchable, who cannot be held accountable, is  
14 that something that the Board of Education is aware of?  
15 Is that something that could be contributing to the  
16 very low level of complaints about discriminatory  
17 practices in the Bridgeport school system because  
18 principals and colleagues are fearful to complain  
19 because their careers might be toppled --

20 MS. GETER: The principals --

21 MR. JOHNSON: -- if there are teachers who  
22 are so politically connected, that they are  
23 "untouchable"?

24 MS. GETER: The principals have the  
25 responsibility to do the evaluation of teachers.

1 Sometimes it takes quite a bit of not effort, but you  
2 have to really call it like it is.

3 Unless the principal lets us know, there's  
4 nothing that we can do about it. The principal has to  
5 take that on, evaluate that person properly, whether  
6 the person is doing the job or not, and then in that  
7 way, then we can take over, but it's the responsibility  
8 of that principal to do that, and when that has  
9 happened, and when they are put on special evaluation,  
10 then we are able to deal with the problem, but I think  
11 that has to be something that comes out of the schools.

12 MS. GROSS: But if the principal doesn't do  
13 it, do you hear it through the grapevine that a teacher  
14 has complained or has special privileges? Can you  
15 still not act on the --

16 MS. GETER: If we hear it in the formal  
17 manner, yes.

18 MR. MACY: Mrs. Geter, I think one of the  
19 problems that I've heard, this is the third time down  
20 in Bridgeport already, and one of the things I've heard  
21 is that certain students have hit children even, and  
22 they were "protected teachers".

23 Now, we're not blaming board members, but the  
24 gap seems to be at the superintendent's office, and it  
25 may be that a new broom will sweep clean, and these

1 things won't happen, but I have heard complaints from  
2 people here that this type of thing I said has  
3 happened, and the teachers have been put on paid  
4 vacation, a paid leave, until things have blown over.

5 Have you been aware of things like this?

6 MS. GETER: Well, of course, you always have  
7 union regulations --

8 MR. MACY: I understand that.

9 MS. GETER: -- that they demand, and people  
10 do get excited when someone is accused of something,  
11 and then they're put on leave, and they're still -- but  
12 that has nothing to do with us. That has to do with  
13 the union.

14 But we try whenever we can to expedite those  
15 matters, so that these things can come to a conclusion,  
16 but that is something that we really don't have control  
17 of when it comes to the union.

18 The grievances, we meet with the grievances,  
19 we go over them, and if we have a legitimate way of  
20 dealing with it, we do.

21 MR. MEDINA: Our board will not tolerate  
22 physical abuse in children. Before Mrs. Perez-Dixon  
23 became the principal at Beardsley School, that school  
24 was the site of an allegation of physical manhandling  
25 of students by a teacher. The board conducted a formal

1 hearing. The board took testimony from people, and the  
2 board took action to discipline that teacher.

3 That teacher took an appeal to the Superior  
4 Court, and we were offered all sorts of opportunities  
5 to settle it, and we said no, we're going to go all the  
6 way because we're not going to tolerate this.

7 The Superior Court affirmed our disciplinary  
8 action against that teacher. Now, that matter was so  
9 serious, that the prosecutor actually brought criminal  
10 charges against the teacher. Unfortunately, I think  
11 that case was not handled appropriately, and the person  
12 was acquitted, but so be it.

13 Bottom line here is that we will not tolerate  
14 physical abuse of our children by our teachers, and if  
15 there is anyone who has a credible complaint to make,  
16 they should step forward in confidence, and we will  
17 prosecute it.

18 If things were a little bit lax under the  
19 former superintendent, and who knows now if they were  
20 or not because he's gone, we can guarantee that they  
21 won't be that way under the new superintendent.

22 MR. MACY: We have to move on.

23 DR. CHUN: In response to that, we have made  
24 a couple of announcements this morning and repeatedly  
25 that records are to be kept open until June 30th, and



1 we will accept written submissions.

2 If we receive written complaints between now  
3 and June 21st, we will be forward that to you. Would  
4 you be able to look at that, and --

5 MS. GETER: Yes, certainly.

6 DR. CHUN: -- also, can the committee follow  
7 up with subsequent questions to write in?

8 MS. GETER: Certainly. Be more than happy to  
9 hear from them. We'd be very happy to have enough time  
10 to really cover them sufficiently. I wish I could  
11 stay, but I can't. I have another appointment.

12 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Do we have one more  
13 minute for Mr. Reinoso? Because --

14 MR. REINOSO: 20 seconds?

15 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. 20 seconds.

16 MR. REINOSO: Just we have a series of  
17 charter school, and I'm involved with this group, a 160  
18 kids, city kids, only eight blocks from the city.

19 I'd like to see a little bit more close  
20 relationship between the charter school and the  
21 Bridgeport Public Education System in terms of  
22 technical assistance, maybe funding, grant-writing and  
23 so on and so forth, because we're serving the same  
24 kids.

25 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Thank you very much,

1 and if you have any additional comments that you would  
2 like to share, could you please forward them to us, and  
3 I think the address and everything is written on the  
4 blue sheet.

5 MR. MACY: On the blue -- right. Thank you.

6 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: And I want to thank  
7 the panelists, also. Thank you very much.

8 (Whereupon, a recess was taken.)

9 Panel 3: Treatment of Minority Students and Parents  
10 in Public Schools

11 MR. MACY: We're going to start the meeting  
12 now.

13 First of all, let me introduce myself and the  
14 members of the committee and tell you a little about  
15 our organization.

16 My name is Neil Macy. I'm Chairman of the  
17 State Advisory Committee of the United States  
18 Commission on Civil Rights. Every state has an  
19 advisory committee, and the aim and purpose of the  
20 committee, if you look in your publication, you'll see  
21 one thing, it says, "Community Forum on Police-  
22 Community Relations of Minority Students in the Public  
23 Schools".

24 If you look to the back page, you will see  
25 the Mission Statement of both the United States

1 Commission on Civil Rights and the role of the state  
2 advisory committee, and we're here in conformity with  
3 our responsibilities under the mission assigned to us  
4 by the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

5 I'm Neil Macy, and I'm presently the  
6 chairperson of the Connecticut delegation.

7 The rest of the committee. Rather than  
8 introduce them myself, I'm just going to start with Mr.  
9 Johnson and ask you to introduce yourselves to the  
10 people that are here.

11 MR. JOHNSON: I'm Pat Johnson, and I'm a  
12 member of the advisory committee.

13 MS. GROSS: I'm Marge Gross, and I also am a  
14 member of the advisory committee.

15 MS. BERMAN: I'm Rosalind Berman, and I, too,  
16 am a member of the advisory committee.

17 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Lou Bertha McKenzie-  
18 Wharton. I'm a member, too.

19 DR. CHUN: I'm Ki-Taek Chun from Washington  
20 Office of the Civil Rights Commission, Eastern Regional  
21 Office. I work with these gentlemen and ladies.

22 MR. MACY: The United States is broken up  
23 into areas, and we're in what is called the Eastern  
24 Region, and Dr. Chun has about 17 states in this area  
25 that he has to supervise. So, he needs a pair of

1 roller blades and a lot of energy to carry out his  
2 obligations.

3 Before we begin the program tonight, we have  
4 just received a statement, actually it's more than a  
5 statement, it's a 40-page document, from the Hispanic  
6 Coalition that's in Bridgeport.

7 We have not had a chance ourselves to review  
8 this 40-page document. Dr. Chun will put it together,  
9 and he will make it available to those people,  
10 including the superintendent, because these are issues  
11 that the community has in regard to the school system  
12 in Bridgeport.

13 As I said, we don't have them, but we will  
14 prepare the document for you and ask specific  
15 questions, and hopefully we can get responses from you,  
16 and obviously if you share this with your staff and  
17 with the state -- with the Bridgeport Board of  
18 Education, that may be helpful in completing this.

19 Let me introduce some of the people that are  
20 presently here, although there are a few more on their  
21 way.

22 I'm very pleased to have here somebody who  
23 brings me back to the days when my children were her  
24 age, and that's because she is presently serving, even  
25 though she's only a senior in Bridgeport Central High

1 School, she's serves presently as a member of the State  
2 Board of Education and has been there this year and  
3 will -- I think you finish in June.

4 Her name is Danielle Robles, and I asked her  
5 what college she's going to be going to next year, and  
6 do you remember the -- for those of you that were here  
7 earlier, the member of the Board of Education stated  
8 that they have two students that are going to Harvard.

9 I'm pleased to inform you that Ms. Robles is  
10 one of the two that's been accepted to Harvard  
11 University, and she'll be going there not too long in  
12 the future, and she will be speaking.

13 Seated to her left is Mr. Robert Pierce from  
14 the United States Department of Education. He serves  
15 out of the Boston office, and it's his responsibility  
16 to enforce civil rights for the students and their  
17 parents in any community that complains that they are --  
18 -- because of discriminatory reasons, they are not  
19 getting the services they are expected to get, and he  
20 was at our last session and will speak during this  
21 session, and whatever we find as -- when we finish our  
22 hearings, and we come out with recommendations will be  
23 shared with the office of Mr. Pierce, and he will then  
24 determine if there have been violations of people's  
25 civil rights, and what, if anything, should be done.

1           Seated next to -- on the right of Ms. Robles  
2 is Rebecca Johnson. She is a local attorney who has  
3 represented students who have complained -- disabled  
4 students, among others, who have complained that their  
5 civil rights have been violated by the City of  
6 Bridgeport, and she is one of the speakers.

7           Seated next to her is Laurayne Farrar-James,  
8 who's head of the Action Team in Bridgeport, and one of  
9 those that has been in contact with us over the period  
10 when we were deciding to hold hearings here.

11           Seated next to her is the interim  
12 Superintendent of Schools of the City of Bridgeport,  
13 Daniel Shamas. The last superintendent resigned just a  
14 few months ago. The Board is in the process of picking  
15 a new superintendent.

16           In fact, one of the people asked the  
17 president of the Board today, could you give us the  
18 name of the new superintendent? They haven't signed  
19 the contract yet. So, until a contract is signed,  
20 there's no agreement.

21           There is another member of the panel who will  
22 be coming, she has not arrived yet, and when she  
23 arrives, we will introduce her.

24           Now, without taking any further of their  
25 time, we're going to try to limit each of the speakers

1 to approximately 11 or 12 minutes, and you'll -- Dr.  
2 Ki-Taek Chun counts for the knock-downs, and he will  
3 give you a notice when the time has passed, and at that  
4 point, you will have a minute or two to finish your  
5 statement, and then we will go on, and after the  
6 statements are all completed, then anybody in the  
7 audience can either make a statement or ask questions.

8 What we request the people to do who wish to  
9 speak is to come up to the podium in front, state your  
10 name very clearly, and then give your statement, and  
11 you can direct it to anybody on the panel or to the  
12 panel in general, however you wish.

13 Okay. I think that takes care with the  
14 introductory things, and, so, I would first ask  
15 Danielle, if you would like to get up and give your  
16 statement?

17 MS. ROBLES: Sure.

18 MR. MACY: And by the way, we would like your  
19 statements in writing, if you can, because when we  
20 publish our findings, we don't want to go just by what  
21 the court stenographer says. We'd like to have your  
22 actual wording, the way you want to put it, because  
23 sometimes we tend to ad lib when we talk, and you will  
24 have a chance to give us a written statement that best  
25 expresses your view.

1           These written statements should be sent to  
2           the Commission on Civil Rights in care of Dr. Ki-Taek  
3           Chun. The address is on the registration form that you  
4           have. You can send it to his office in Washington,  
5           D.C., and without further ado, Danielle?

6           MS. ROBLES: Okay. As a student in the  
7           Bridgeport school system, I have seen both the  
8           successes and injustices in urban school districts.  
9           There are many students who go on to higher education,  
10          but there are far too many who fall through the cracks  
11          in the system.

12          This year, I am serving as a student member  
13          of the State Board of Education, where I have learned  
14          that the existing problems are not peculiar to  
15          Bridgeport. However, the fact that the issues exist  
16          nationwide is not an excuse to allow the system to  
17          erode on the most basic levels.

18          A clean building and an adequate staff are  
19          fundamental elements of any good school. The disrepair  
20          of the buildings in Bridgeport and other public schools  
21          is appalling. Roofs are falling down, pipes are  
22          bursting, and the grounds around many schools are  
23          littered with trash.

24          The bathrooms in my high school are  
25          revolting. Many students have refused to enter the



1 bathroom even once in four years. Two years ago, the  
2 lockers in the girls' and boys' locker rooms in my  
3 school were replaced, giving the room a much better  
4 appearance, but the stench and the filth in the  
5 bathroom made me feel embarrassed to even be in there  
6 while visiting teams were using the locker room.

7 Two and a half years ago, in my sophomore  
8 year, my mother made a small stain with lipstick on one  
9 of the mirrors to see when it would be cleaned. In  
10 January of 2000 of my senior year, it was still there.

11 Everything I have described portrays a simple  
12 lack of respect for students and teachers. What child  
13 is going to learn when they are cold because the  
14 heating system does not work or mice are running around  
15 the classroom? In such an environment, any child is  
16 incapable of feeling valued.

17 The maintenance system in Bridgeport is based  
18 on crisis management rather than preventive  
19 maintenance. Requirements should be set for the  
20 standards of cleanliness in each school. Then there  
21 will be accountability when the job is not being done  
22 rather than passing blame from the kids to the  
23 custodians to the administrators.

24 Another major problem in urban schools is  
25 insufficient guidance staff available for students in

1 need. Guidance counselors have had as many as 440  
2 students per counselor in Bridgeport while their  
3 counterparts in wealthier neighboring districts have  
4 much lower ratios. In my high school, counselors have  
5 about 260 students per counselor, a number that is  
6 still much too high.

7           This is my senior year in high school.  
8 Throughout the entire year, I have watched students, my  
9 friends, fall through the cracks in the system.  
10 Students who do not have exemplary records need more,  
11 not less, guidance and support.

12           I know people who won't graduate for  
13 ridiculous reasons that should have been -- that could  
14 have been handled much earlier in the year very easily.  
15 All the times these students need just that, more  
16 guidance and support because they don't understand the  
17 rights of students, and their parents most of the time  
18 don't know their rights and responsibilities as parents  
19 in the school.

20           These are the students who find out that they  
21 can't graduate at the end of their senior year because  
22 no one took the time to give them the extra push that  
23 they need or take the time to make sure that they're on  
24 the right track.

25           Sometimes the system is at fault, and

1 sometimes it isn't. Guidance counselors have far too  
2 many students in urban districts. However, there's  
3 also an unspoken message to concentrate on the students  
4 who are already doing well while leaving the less  
5 successful students to fend for themselves in a system  
6 of rules and regulations they don't understand and  
7 sometimes don't even know exist.

8 Classroom teachers cannot carry the  
9 responsibility of reaching out to every student.  
10 Support staff is essential for students in need of help  
11 and to any school system that expects service all its  
12 students well.

13 The only way to combat this deficiency is to  
14 create a system where guidance counselors do not feel  
15 overwhelmed and know that the fate of every student is  
16 important.

17 These are educational equity issues. We must  
18 recognize that often, students in urban schools need  
19 more support than their suburban counterparts, and that  
20 insufficient assistance at a critical moment can mean  
21 the difference in a student's success or failure.

22 Schools with large minority populations  
23 always seem to get the short end of the stick. Some  
24 blame it on poverty, lack of funding or apathy, but no  
25 matter what the reason, all students deserve the best

1 education possible.

2           Tonight is a step in the right direction.  
3 Communication and dialogue are important to any school  
4 system that plans to change and improve with the times,  
5 but merely voicing our concerns is not enough. People  
6 on all levels, federal, state and local, need to take  
7 action to amend the problems.

8           There is no magic wand that will fix every  
9 issue, but any step to improve schools physically or  
10 academically is worth taking for the lives and  
11 education of all students.

12           Thank you.

13           (Applause)

14           MR. MACY: The next speaker will be Rebecca  
15 Johnson. Rebecca, if you're ready?

16           MS. JOHNSON: Good evening, ladies and  
17 gentlemen. I'm going to very, very brief, and I will  
18 rely on my written statement to fully detail my  
19 concerns, but I will say this.

20           Several months ago, I had the privilege of  
21 meeting a group of ladies, a group of concerned  
22 residents in the City of Bridgeport, who have started  
23 an organization for child advocacy.

24           They also serve as parent advocates, and  
25 their primary concern is the educational -- the state

1 of education and the educational concerns that have  
2 been so widely publicized in the media and have just  
3 resulted in a lot of attention being focused on a lot  
4 of problems that have been left to just grow and grow  
5 beyond -- just beyond unbelievable -- words can't  
6 express how big the problems are that we've  
7 encountered.

8           Through this group, I've met many parents and  
9 heard many complaints from children and parents alike,  
10 problems ranging from children who have been assaulted  
11 by school teachers, children who have been improperly  
12 supervised in the classroom, injuries resulting, all  
13 kinds of traumatic situations that have come to our  
14 attention, and I'm hoping that not only can we focus on  
15 the problems that have come to our attention but that  
16 we can come up with some serious and immediate  
17 solutions to these problems.

18           I have several of my clients who are here  
19 tonight, and I'm certain that when you hear the things  
20 that they have to say, you will understand how  
21 troubling this situation in the school system is, and  
22 I'm glad that the proper attention is going to be  
23 focused on these issues.

24           Thank you.

25           (Applause)

1 MR. MACY: Thank you, Rebecca.

2 Laurayne Farrar-James? To the extent you  
3 can, as Mr. Pierce explained to us, that you feel that  
4 what is going on is a result not of negligence but of  
5 violation of civil rights, it's very important for that  
6 aspect to be brought in.

7 MS. FARRAR-JAMES: Good evening, everyone.

8 Some 2000 years ago, David the Psalmist was  
9 inspired to write that children are a gift from on  
10 high, that children are like arrows in the hands of  
11 warriors, and he continues, "blessed is the man or  
12 woman whose quiver is full of them".

13 That all children are a priceless gift is the  
14 good news. The bad news is we seldom treat them that  
15 way. There are times and far too many, we treat them  
16 like they are arrows to be broken and permanently  
17 removed from our quivers.

18 I am participating in today's forum and in  
19 this particular segment because I care. I am seriously  
20 concerned about the mistreatment from time to time of  
21 some children and parents, as one of my team members --  
22 as all of my team members of Action Team, Mary,  
23 Rebecca, Carmen are. Mistreatment, such as disrespect,  
24 abuse and a violation of one's rights, one's rights,  
25 these things don't just happen. It is all precipitated

1 by other factors.

2 Our public school system in Bridgeport boasts  
3 a population of approximately 22,000 students, ranging  
4 from ages 5 to 18. I got these statistics, this data,  
5 from some recent material that was sent to me by BCAD,  
6 some material that they send out periodically. So, I  
7 think these are their most recent numbers.

8 88 percent of the enrollment, according to  
9 BCAD, is minority. Approximately 76 percent of our  
10 classroom teachers are white or non-minority, whatever  
11 your pleasure, and out of every -- one out of every  
12 four children in Bridgeport lives in poverty.

13 Now, you put this all together, and  
14 somewhere, every now and then, we're going to have a  
15 problem waiting to happen. What we've created in our  
16 system can very well be racial-cultural separation.  
17 Many of us bring into the teacher learning environment  
18 learned behavior and preconceived notions of our  
19 differences that we don't understand, differences that  
20 we find odd and may be even repulsive. Behavior that  
21 limits and perhaps even denies a healthy teacher-  
22 student relationship.

23 Teachers are our children's keepers for 181  
24 days a year, five days a week, six hours a day. The  
25 keepers of our children must be able to sharply

1 identify and have relevance to what is going on in the  
2 lives of each and every child in his or her care.

3 Every teacher has a major, major impact on  
4 the children and their families. A teacher impacts the  
5 way they think, the way they behave, and the way they  
6 grow up.

7 Now, that can be scary if we haven't set this  
8 equation up right. The fact is, again, approximately  
9 88 percent of our children in the system are minority,  
10 and approximately 76 percent of our teachers are white  
11 or non-minority, whatever your pleasure.

12 Now, this is the way it sometimes plays out,  
13 and may I add, if one child falls through the cracks or  
14 one parent is disrespected or abused, it is far too  
15 many, and this is the way -- I'm just going to give you  
16 some examples of some things that have come before us  
17 in the way this whole scenario plays out.

18 A minority child is told by non-minority  
19 children that he or she is worthless. You'll never  
20 grow up and amount to anything, and we must remember  
21 that language preempts pain, and it also leads to  
22 violence.

23 Or a mother is told she doesn't need to be  
24 told certain information about her child's progress and  
25 so forth and so on, because she wouldn't understand



1 anyway, or a child may be struck by a teacher and told  
2 if you tell your parents, I'll have your father  
3 arrested and sent to jail, if he isn't in jail already.

4 Now, those are some things that have come to  
5 us, and those are some things that are very hurtful,  
6 and just some examples of not having the relevance to  
7 understand what is going on in a household or in the  
8 life or the experience of a child because there is a  
9 wide gap in racial and cultural -- well, there is a  
10 great racial-cultural difference, but there's great  
11 racial-cultural separation.

12 We need to change the way we are doing  
13 business. We must uproot this problem so that we can  
14 cease putting out all of these brush fires, such as  
15 disrespecting parents, that's a brush fire, trying to  
16 fix the dropout rate, trying to fix violence in the  
17 classrooms, finding answers to retention problems, low  
18 test scores, suspension problems, truancy, improper  
19 placement, illiteracy, and the list just reads on and  
20 on.

21 What do we need? We need new attitudes. We  
22 need to care. We need to care more. Children have to  
23 be nurtured from the heart. People who care interact  
24 in a healthy way.

25 This afternoon, I was able to attend one of

1 the sessions, and Mr. Felipe Reinoso, who is the  
2 director and principal of one of our charter schools,  
3 Bridge Academy, sort of touched on this subject of  
4 attitude and interacting in a positive way with one  
5 another.

6 He indicated that he entered the room with  
7 some other educators, and he spoke, good evening,  
8 nobody spoke to him, and he was really crushed, and he  
9 went on to tell us in his culture, that's unheard of.  
10 You speak to people you don't even know. I mean, you  
11 pass somebody, a warm body, and you greet the person,  
12 and I was struck by that because most certainly, in my  
13 culture, and most especially in my family, that's what  
14 we do.

15 If you pass by me too close, I may grab you  
16 and hug you. It's just what we do. We're glad to see  
17 people. We never tell each other on a day that we  
18 don't love each other and that we let each other know  
19 that we really care.

20 These are examples that we have to pass on to  
21 children. They learn by examples. I can't imagine not  
22 hugging a child before you're getting ready to teach  
23 him a brand-new concept or touching him in a very  
24 nurturing way, and we just have to know that in order  
25 to turn this problem around, we're going to have to

1 change our hearts.

2 We have to care about our children. They are  
3 gifts from on high. David said it in the Book of  
4 Psalms. It was inspired for him to write it, and that  
5 certainly is a rule for us to live by.

6 Children are in the hands, he said, of  
7 warriors. Teachers are warriors. They have skilled  
8 hands, but we also have to have the warm heart, and I  
9 was really struck by Mr. Reinoso's notice that when he  
10 spoke, nobody responded to him, and that happens to  
11 children a lot. They want attention, and nobody's  
12 really paying attention.

13 Mrs. Geter was on that same panel this  
14 afternoon, and she let us know that student achievement  
15 is a primary goal of the Board of Education of the  
16 school system. Most certainly, we all concur with  
17 that. We all buy into that.

18 Where we are now is how are we going to make  
19 that happen? What are we going to do to make that  
20 happen? We've tried programs after programs after  
21 programs. We all concur that our resources are -- tend  
22 to be limited. We do need more resources. But the  
23 main resource we need is ourselves. We need to put  
24 ourselves in it. We need to care. We need to put our  
25 hearts in the development of our children.

1           I say our children because all children are  
2 my children. All children are your children. If we  
3 begin to separate out who belongs to who when we're  
4 teaching children, we're going to have a problem. We  
5 have to care.

6           I want the same things for you and your  
7 family that I want for my family, that I want for  
8 myself and my children. I want the best. I think I  
9 deserve the best. I know my children deserve the best.  
10 I have three sons. They are wonderful. We are just  
11 fortunate and blessed to be able to send them to the  
12 best schools.

13           I have one son out of Yale. I have one son  
14 out of Cornell. I have another out of the University  
15 of Oklahoma. They are grown men who are making a major  
16 contribution in this world. I care. My husband cared.  
17 My family cared. We all have to care. I made sure  
18 that everybody who had something to do with their  
19 development cared.

20           Now, we just have to get down into our hearts  
21 that we've got to change this whole problem of  
22 preconceived notions about what it is that is different  
23 from the others, from what we are, and get to a point  
24 of greater understanding. If we don't understand what  
25 is in our environment, then we will come up with some

1 preconceived notions and some attitudes that are not  
2 healthy about what it is that is in our environment.

3 In summary, I would like to say that we need  
4 to agree to stop breaking our arrows and put our hearts  
5 into what faces us and that is care, education and  
6 development of our children.

7 Thank you.

8 (Applause)

9 MR. MACY: Thank you, Laurayne Farrar-James.

10 The next speaker will be a parent with  
11 children in the Bridgeport school system, Marsha  
12 McGhee.

13 MS. MCGHEE: Good evening. My name is Marsha  
14 McGhee, and I have a child in the Bridgeport school  
15 system. My son is 10. He's been in the system for  
16 five years.

17 In that short time, I've encountered at least  
18 three incidences with the Board of Education that I  
19 find alarming, and I went through so much to try to get  
20 someone to just hear me, just to listen to what I had  
21 to say, that my child was abused in the school system,  
22 and I had no recourse, no where to go, no one to  
23 listen, no one to make me feel like my child and myself  
24 were important.

25 The first incident that my child encountered

1 was in November of 1997. My child was pinched by a  
2 principal in his school. Later on, he was slapped by  
3 that same person. I was not made aware of this until  
4 January of the following year, where I found on that  
5 specific date, my child was jacked up by that same  
6 person, slammed in the chair, and he was threatened to  
7 be slapped.

8 I immediately called -- I followed the  
9 channels that I thought were necessary. I called the  
10 Department of Children and Family Services. I called  
11 the police department. I got no where. I called Henry  
12 Kelly's office the following day, left several messages  
13 for him to call me back. He called back only to tell  
14 me that he had spoken with the gentleman, his name is  
15 Mr. Rikowski, and told him that he was not to touch any  
16 child at all and any incidents at all, unless it was to  
17 separate a fight.

18 Mr. Kelly also told me at that point that he  
19 would remove my child from that school. I didn't ask  
20 him to remove my child from that school. He had been  
21 there for a couple of years. He was comfortable. He  
22 liked his teacher. He liked his classroom. Why should  
23 my child be removed when he didn't do anything wrong?

24 Okay. The next year, my child's head was  
25 slammed face front on a cafeteria table by one of the

1 cafeteria staff. I again contacted Mr. Kelly's office  
2 and advised him of the situation. I was told by Mr.  
3 Kelly's representative, the principal at the time, that  
4 that cafeteria worker would be removed from the school.

5 We had a meeting with that employee, the  
6 principal of the school, his then teacher, who has been  
7 a support beam for me from then until now, and I was  
8 told -- actually I asked the woman, I said, "Why? Why  
9 did you put your hands on my child, and why did you  
10 slam his head on the table? I don't know" was her  
11 response.

12 Now, had I been in a grocery store or any  
13 kind of store and disciplining my child, anyone could  
14 have called the police, and my child would have been  
15 taken away from me. I don't understand why there's  
16 such a double standard.

17 The last incident -- well, not the last, but  
18 another incident, my son was outside the school, and he  
19 was pushed by another child, and he fell. My son  
20 sustained injuries to his permanent teeth where they  
21 were basically cut in half. I was not by any way  
22 supported by the Board of Education, by the principal,  
23 by anyone at that school to tell me what my rights were  
24 at that point. No one ever talked to me. No one ever  
25 said anything.

1           The principal told me that they needed to do  
2 an incident report. I waited over a month to get a  
3 copy of the incident report. At that point, I got a  
4 copy of the report, and the facts were not as they  
5 happened. It made it seem like my child just fell, and  
6 he did not just fall. He was pushed.

7           I contacted the principal to find out how we  
8 could get the report corrected because it was not  
9 correct. She told me that there was no way that it  
10 could be changed. The report was sent downtown. She  
11 never said to where. She never said to whose  
12 department, whose office, nothing.

13           Again, I felt like nobody hears me, nobody  
14 understands this is my child. I love him, and I feel  
15 like when I've sent him to school, he should not be  
16 subjected to any of this, none of this. I don't do it  
17 to him, why should anyone else have the right to?

18           Another incident is where -- with this same  
19 school, I feel like my child and I are being harassed  
20 at this point. I received a call at my job telling me  
21 that I needed to speak with a worker from the  
22 Department of Children and Family Services because  
23 there was something going on at the school.

24           I immediately left, and I met with this man  
25 whose name is Mr. Chumatasi from the Department of



1 Children and Family Services. I was at that point  
2 advised how to handle the situation, and I'm like,  
3 "Well, what situation are you talking about? What is  
4 it that has happened?"

5 I was accused of abusing my child. There was  
6 a report made at the Department of Children and Family  
7 Services that I neglected my child and that I abused  
8 him. There was no substantial evidence. There was  
9 nothing indicating why this report was even made.

10 I couldn't even be told who made the report.  
11 If it wasn't for Rebecca Johnson, I would still be  
12 fighting with the Department of Children and Family  
13 Services right now, trying to defend myself. I didn't  
14 do anything to my child. He's sitting right there, and  
15 he's never been abused, never by me. By the Board of  
16 Education, by the City of Bridgeport, yes.

17 I just think that it's totally unfair that I  
18 have to go through all of this for my child to get a  
19 proper education.

20 Okay. The last incident in April, I had a  
21 conference with the -- well, actually the PPT Committee  
22 at his school, resulting -- basically regarding his  
23 behavior since this incident. The first incident has  
24 happened, my child, basically his behavior, his  
25 personality has done a complete 360. He's not the same

1 child.

2 I was advised by this council that I should  
3 take my child to get some counseling with a group of  
4 children that are non-aggressive. Among other things,  
5 they told me to put my child on the baseball team.  
6 Okay. I did put him on the baseball team, and after  
7 going through all this research and hours of phone  
8 calls and time out of work, I finally found out that  
9 the suggestion that they made for me to go outside and  
10 find counseling is something that they should provide  
11 my child with.

12 Another thing that they did not tell me. I  
13 had to go outside the Board of Education to find this  
14 information. I think it's totally unfair, and it's  
15 wrong that parents that have children in the school  
16 system are blind of all the information that is  
17 available to parents.

18 It's totally unfair that I have to have  
19 outside sources to give me the information that I need  
20 about my child who's in the Board of Education.

21 Thank you.

22 MR. MACY: Thank you very much.

23 (Applause)

24 MR. MACY: Has Sauda Baraka shown up yet? Is  
25 she out here?

1 (No response)

2 MR. MACY: No? Okay. Let me now call on the  
3 Superintendent of Schools, the interim superintendent,  
4 who, by the way, as you probably know, has only been  
5 superintendent since March. So that -- but he will  
6 attempt as best he can to respond to some of the  
7 statements that have been made.

8 Mr. Shamas?

9 MR. SHAMAS: Good evening.

10 I'll try to respond to some of the  
11 allegations that have been made, specifically as I see  
12 them, and as I know them, and some of them, I cannot  
13 because many of them or some, I think, that were  
14 outlined here this evening were before my arrival.

15 I came on the scene March 1st as the acting  
16 superintendent of schools in Bridgeport. My role and  
17 responsibility was to obviously keep the school  
18 district moving along during this interim period while  
19 the Board of Education was searching for a permanent  
20 superintendent.

21 As many of you know, all of you know here,  
22 this last third of the school year is a critical time  
23 when you're also trying to wind down, getting schools  
24 closed, and all those things that happen at the end of  
25 the year.

1           So, my job was to kind of keep the school  
2 district moving in the direction it had been moving, so  
3 that there would be some continuity while the school  
4 board went about looking for a permanent  
5 superintendent, which is what happened. So, I came on  
6 March 1st.

7           Some of the comments that were made this  
8 evening, I can address specifically because I have been  
9 directly involved with them since March 1st. Others, I  
10 will not be able to respond to because there are some  
11 specific allegations that were made that I'm not  
12 familiar with.

13           So, let me begin by generally putting these  
14 topics into some broad categories. The first one that  
15 Danielle raised, who, by the way, spoke very clearly  
16 and articulately, and I think everyone got the message,  
17 Danielle raised some interesting issues about school  
18 climates, specifically referring to cleanliness,  
19 adequate staffing, maintenance issues.

20           Those were issues that I was confronted with  
21 March 1st. I don't think it was any secret, most of  
22 you know that there was a terrible situation that  
23 occurred last July and August before the school year,  
24 the new school year began, when the State Department of  
25 Environmental Protection and the State Health

1 Department came down and during their inspections found  
2 some rather nasty situations, that, by the way, were  
3 addressed immediately by the school board long before I  
4 came on.

5 Some of the things that the school board did  
6 immediately was, to address the situation, was to  
7 contract with a refuse -- a trash hauler who provided  
8 these huge bins outside each of the schools that would  
9 be picked up on a daily basis.

10 Up until that time, the school district had  
11 not done that and rather relied on our own maintenance  
12 department and our own garbage trucks to go around from  
13 school to school and remove the trash, and I guess what  
14 was happening is in my instances, particularly with --  
15 in the summertime, where our schools are now open year-  
16 round, we have summer camps, summer programs, in all of  
17 the schools that provide lunches.

18 Particularly in the summer time, with the  
19 situation with garbage and milk and that kind of  
20 spoilage, it reached an unbearable situation. So,  
21 anyway, we now have this refuse collection that's  
22 taking place on a rather regular basis, which totally  
23 eliminated that problem.

24 The Board of Education also contracted with  
25 an integrated pest management control company which now

1 services the schools in providing a total integration  
2 pest management program for all the schools.

3 We are also working very closely with our own  
4 health department, where we now have a program with the  
5 sanitarians in our health department who come out and  
6 visit our schools on a rather regular basis, along with  
7 the housing code enforcement officer, taking a look at  
8 our schools, reporting back to us what and where, if  
9 any, violations are, so that we can respond to them on  
10 a rather immediate basis rather than waiting till this  
11 thing escalates into becoming a real problem.

12 The Board of Education contracted with a  
13 consultant group to come in and take a look at the  
14 operations of the maintenance department, to look at  
15 everything, from staffing to facilities to operations  
16 in the maintenance department. That report is coming  
17 to the Board within the next week or two, I believe.  
18 They're finishing up their final draft, and they'll be  
19 reporting back to the Board with some specific  
20 recommendations.

21 However, while that was going on, what we did  
22 do, since March 1st, is take advantage of the fact that  
23 the previous school facilities director for the Board  
24 of Education resigned soon after my coming in March  
25 1st.

1           We then brought over the director of  
2 maintenance on the City of Bridgeport side, so there'd  
3 be no down time, brought him over to head up the whole  
4 school facilities operation along with taking a look at  
5 putting in some controls in terms of the way we had  
6 been operating, and what we've been able to do to date  
7 has been to immediately provide more supervision.

8           We did not have adequate supervision for the  
9 number of custodians we have in our schools, absolutely  
10 not. We have a 160 custodians approximately. We had  
11 one custodial supervisor. Couldn't do it. So, now we  
12 have more custodial supervision, and it's broken down  
13 in geographical areas, so that the number of custodians  
14 per supervisor is a lot less than it had been.

15           The other thing we're doing is putting our  
16 custodians on what we're calling, for lack of a better  
17 term, and I'm not sure if this is accurate or not, a  
18 third shift, which means that the buildings should be  
19 cleaned when there's no one in the buildings. It's  
20 very difficult to do an adequate job cleaning the  
21 buildings while you have kids and teachers and classes  
22 and activity going on in the building.

23           So, by rearranging the schedule of the  
24 custodians, we are now putting our custodians and, for  
25 the first time, we're looking at putting on our

1 maintenance department.

2           The maintenance department, when I say  
3 maintenance department, I'm really talking about  
4 mechanics. These are the skilled tradesmen, the  
5 electricians, the plumbers, the steamfitters, the  
6 masons, the painters, the glaziers, rather than having  
7 all of them working during the day and trying to make  
8 repairs while the school's in session, we're also  
9 taking a look at putting the bulk of those tradesmen on  
10 in the evening, so when they go into a school, they can  
11 go in, do what has to be done, and get out without the  
12 constant interruption of classes changing, preventing  
13 them from doing what they have to do, and giving us a  
14 lot of down time. So, that has just been started.

15           We recognize the fact that we've been hiring  
16 custodians, and we haven't been training them, so that  
17 we're looking right now at providing a very  
18 comprehensive training program for our school  
19 custodians so that when you come on board as a school  
20 custodian, you'll be trained so that you know exactly  
21 what's expected of you, and the standards that we  
22 require.

23           So, this has all happened since March 1st.  
24 It's an on-going process. As you can imagine, it's  
25 been a tug of war right now, given the personnel issues



1 that are involved, but we're working our way through  
2 it.

3 I think we're going to start to see some of  
4 the improvements that Danielle alluded to in her  
5 statement. I think it's going to make for more  
6 adequate use of staff time. It's going to give us  
7 cleaner buildings, and I think we're going to kind of  
8 start to see the results that we would accept as a  
9 standard. So, that's taken place.

10 At the same time, we'll be taking a look at  
11 some of the recommendations that the consultants will  
12 be making to us and acting on those.

13 Globally, Laurayne, if I could try to kind of  
14 characterize her remarks globally, if she'll permit me,  
15 I think much of what Laurayne was referring to was in  
16 the category of mistreatment of children, mistreatment  
17 of parents, and when she talks about mistreatment, I  
18 think she's talking about, and she indicated, a  
19 disrespect, a violation of rights.

20 She talked about 88 percent of our student  
21 population being minority, 76 percent of our staff  
22 population being non-minority, and that there needs to  
23 be more caring.

24 Well, we have been making a very, very  
25 active, proactive recruitment campaign, trying to

1 recruit more minority teachers, minority administrators  
2 into the school district.

3 This isn't something that's new, however.  
4 This is something that has been on-going. I know that  
5 the Board of Education has a recruitment team. The  
6 Board of Education has actively been sending the  
7 personnel office out all over the country to recruit  
8 staff, minority staff, both administration and  
9 teachers, to serve in the school district.

10 You have to understand we're not alone in  
11 this. Every city in Connecticut is sitting right there  
12 with us as we go out and recruit. Every city in the  
13 South is sitting right there with us recruiting  
14 minority teachers. These are the reports that we're  
15 getting back.

16 So, the situation that we have here in terms  
17 of recruiting minority staff to Bridgeport is one that  
18 we're experiencing not only within the state but  
19 outside of the state as well, and it's been very  
20 difficult at best, but we're trying, and we're out  
21 there, and we don't let an opportunity go by without at  
22 least Bridgeport being present there.

23 Well, Laurayne said that we need to care  
24 more, and I can't agree with her more. We do need to  
25 care more, but one thing that hasn't been mentioned,

1 and it wasn't mentioned, is along with the caring, I  
2 think there needs to be more communication. That's a  
3 very important piece. The dialogue.

4           There has to be communication. There has to  
5 be dialogue between the school, the school  
6 administration, the school staff, and the parents. I  
7 think that's the only thing that's going to eliminate  
8 some of the perceptions that occur in the school  
9 district, and that's the only thing that's going to  
10 eliminate some of perhaps the allegations that you  
11 heard this evening, and in order to develop this  
12 dialogue, in order to develop more parental -- more and  
13 better parental support -- we hear this all the time.

14           We need more parent support. We need more  
15 parent support. That's really a two-way street. It's  
16 one thing for me to stand here and say, listen, you  
17 know, we need more parental support. We just don't get  
18 it in any of our schools. But I think that we have an  
19 obligation to reach out to the parents and try to bring  
20 the parents in and make the school as comfortable for  
21 the parents to come in. That's important, and I think  
22 that that attitude of being welcomed as a parent starts  
23 at the front door of the school.

24           It doesn't start with the teacher. It  
25 doesn't start with the principal. It starts as soon as

1 the parent walks in the front door and greets the  
2 secretary, greets the school custodian, whoever that  
3 first point of contact is, and I think we have to do a  
4 better job to make the schools more open and more  
5 comfortable to parents, but the parents also have to  
6 reach out to us and come to us and begin that dialogue  
7 with us. So, I think it's a two-way street.

8 We talked about -- I think Laurayne talked  
9 about student achievement, paraphrasing something that  
10 our president of the board indicated. Yes, we are  
11 about student achievement. Yes, we do measure our  
12 schools. Whether we like it or not, the criteria  
13 that's used for measuring our schools or any other  
14 schools, any other school district, in the state is  
15 school achievement, how well the kids are doing on the  
16 state tests.

17 However, having said that, though, in order  
18 for students to produce, in order to get that type of  
19 achievement that you're looking for, you need high  
20 expectations on the part of the teachers, on the part  
21 of the administration, and on the part of the parents.  
22 They should demand that.

23 But you also have to have the proper  
24 infrastructure to support that. That infrastructure  
25 goes back to providing a clean, safe environment for

1 all this to take place.

2 I think that sessions like this can be  
3 helpful because it gives everyone the opportunity to  
4 kind of put their thoughts, perceptions, experiences,  
5 on the table, but I don't think it should end here  
6 because if we all walk out of here, and this is it,  
7 then we've gone no where.

8 I think what really has to happen, if  
9 anything, if we're going to be successful with  
10 anything, is going to be what happens after this in the  
11 communication between the parents, the community, and  
12 the administration and the schools.

13 I don't think that's going to happen in this  
14 room, whether you want to believe it or not. I think  
15 it's going to happen when you leave this room, and the  
16 folks here that represent the community and the parents  
17 here get together with the school administration and  
18 continue the dialogue.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause)

21 MR. MACY: For the record, I should point out  
22 that when I talked to Mr. Shamas before, which was a  
23 week or two ago, we had requested that both the  
24 assistant superintendent of schools, Henry Kelly, and  
25 the associate superintendent of schools, Dr. Mendelez,

1 also come. He had told me tonight that they were at  
2 other functions of the school board.

3 I would request, since some of the questions  
4 which obviously you couldn't answer were very specific,  
5 that -- and you know what the questions are, that when  
6 you meet with them, and you hopefully prepare a written  
7 response to us, that you will have talked to them and  
8 gotten a little more information from them that you  
9 could add to the report.

10 Now, it's obvious that whatever happens here  
11 is going to go beyond here. We're only hearing these  
12 things.

13 Mr. Pierce, and all of you, should have  
14 received a copy, there was one at each place, of the  
15 role of the Office for Civil Rights as related to  
16 education.

17 As I said, Mr. Pierce comes out of the Boston  
18 office. He has listed a number of the suits that have  
19 taken place that his office has been involved in over  
20 the period of years, and I'm going to now turn the  
21 meeting over to Mr. Pierce. So, you're on your own.

22 MR. PIERCE: Thank you, Mr. Macy.

23 My name is Robert Pierce. I'm from the U.S.  
24 Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, the  
25 office in Boston. That is a regional office

1 responsible for enforcing the civil rights laws on  
2 education in the six New England states, Maine, New  
3 Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and  
4 Massachusetts.

5 I don't have a prepared statement, but what I  
6 did bring were a number of brochures, each of the  
7 panelists at the head table has a copy, and I have  
8 provided a copy to the recorder for the record, and  
9 this will contain a lot of the general information that  
10 I'm going to talk about.

11 There are additional copies in the back of  
12 the room. So, if you don't have a copy already, be  
13 sure to take a copy, maybe take two copies, if you have  
14 a friend that you'd like to take a copy to, because it  
15 does contain some information that might be useful to  
16 you in a variety of ways.

17 I listed on the white board behind the panel  
18 ways that you can get additional information about the  
19 Department of Education and the Office for Civil  
20 Rights. There's a wealth of information available, and  
21 it's easy to get if you have access to the Internet.  
22 Most of this stuff is available on the Internet, and  
23 you can just download it from our web site, but if you  
24 don't have Internet access, or if it's not convenient,  
25 you can call toll free and request a lot of information

1 on a lot of subjects.

2 One of the publications that I have on the  
3 table, one of the -- the one-page document entitled  
4 "OCR Publications" lists some of the things that are  
5 available under the laws that we enforce, covering a  
6 wide variety of topics, and this information is  
7 available by just calling my office, and we will put a  
8 copy in the mail to you or most of it is available on  
9 the web site or you can call the toll free number, and  
10 it will be put in the mail to you, and you can get it  
11 within two weeks.

12 The Office for Civil Rights is the part of  
13 the Department of Education that is responsible for  
14 enforcing five laws that prohibit discrimination.  
15 Taken together, these laws prohibit discrimination on  
16 the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex and  
17 disability.

18 The specific laws are Title 6 of the Civil  
19 Rights Act of 1964, which covers race, color and  
20 national origin; Title 9 of the Education Amendments of  
21 1972, which covers non-discrimination on the basis of  
22 sex; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the  
23 Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which covers disability;  
24 and the newest law that we cover, which is Title 2 of  
25 the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990.



1           We carry out our work in three major ways.  
2           The first way we call technical assistance, and that  
3           can be something as simple as answering a question that  
4           is posed to us when a parent or student or member of  
5           the public calls our office and asks a question about  
6           some of the laws that we enforce or some situation that  
7           they may have encountered at a school district or at a  
8           college or university.

9           Another way that we enforce the laws is to  
10          conduct what we call compliance reviews, and we do  
11          those in a variety of ways. The traditional reviews  
12          are reviews that will go in and take an issue and  
13          investigate it, make a determination, and if there's a  
14          violation, then work on obtaining a corrective action  
15          plan from a school district.

16          But in recent years, we have tried a new  
17          approach, which we call a proactive approach, where we  
18          do a type of review where the recipient organization,  
19          whether it's a school district or a college or  
20          university, participates in the review process with the  
21          state. They do somewhat of a self-analysis, and at the  
22          end, we jointly develop corrective measures to address  
23          any problems that may be found.

24          But the third way that we carry out our  
25          responsibility is to respond to complaints. We call

1 our complaint investigation work the bread and butter  
2 of our existence because for every complaint, we will  
3 respond. We will consider that complaint.

4 If we receive a complaint, we try to send out  
5 an acknowledgement letter within two days of receipt,  
6 to say that we have it, and that we're going to  
7 evaluate it to determine whether we have jurisdiction,  
8 to determine whether it is appropriate for us to  
9 investigate it or to try to resolve it.

10 We try to complete that evaluation process  
11 within 30 days, to let you know whether we will go  
12 forward with it or not, and if we do go forward with  
13 it, we then try to complete our process within about a  
14 130 days. We don't do that in all cases. Sometimes it  
15 might take us as long as a year to complete an  
16 investigation and to work out a resolution, but in many  
17 cases, we do complete our work in less than a 135 days.

18 I looked at -- in preparation for this forum  
19 tonight, I took a look at what our experience had been  
20 in Bridgeport and in Connecticut over the last three  
21 years, and in terms of complaints, we get somewhere on  
22 the average of 30 to 40 complaints per year at the  
23 elementary and secondary level from the State of  
24 Connecticut. 35 or 40 a year on average over the last  
25 three years. That's what the experience has been. In

1 some years, it's been much higher, but last three  
2 years, it's averaged about 30-35-40.

3 In that period of time, we have also  
4 conducted about 11 compliance reviews, and the main  
5 difference between a compliance review and a complaint  
6 investigation is that a complaint investigation is a  
7 reactive kind of activity. We're going as a result of  
8 having received a complaint from someone that  
9 discrimination is occurring.

10 In the case of a compliance review, we're  
11 going on our own initiative. We are perhaps addressing  
12 an issue that we think there's a problem surrounding,  
13 but perhaps we have not gotten any complaints about it.  
14 We do that as a result of research that we do,  
15 information that we might receive from various sources.

16 Some of the kinds of complaint compliance  
17 reviews that we've conducted during this period of time  
18 would include reviews, such as services to students  
19 with limited English proficiency. We've done a few  
20 involving Title 9 athletics. We've done some reviews  
21 of vocational programs for gender equity. We've done a  
22 few related to placement of students in special  
23 education programs.

24 We have been concerned about a problem  
25 nationwide with the disproportionate referral of

1 minority students to special education programs. So,  
2 we've taken a look at that in a few districts around  
3 the state.

4 And, finally, another type of review that we  
5 have done has to do with gifted and talented programs  
6 tracking. Ability grouping is another term used for  
7 that. This is an area where we have the opposite  
8 concern that we've seen in special education, where we  
9 see a disproportionate referral of minority students to  
10 special education and the ability grouping, gifted and  
11 talented program, as we see the opposite of that in  
12 under-representation of minority students.

13 So, where we have seen that, we've gone in to  
14 take a look at how that happens, how are decisions made  
15 about how students get into these programs, and are the  
16 policies or the practices discriminatory.

17 Sometimes the policies are fine, but it's the  
18 implementation of the policies that we sometimes find  
19 problems with when the policies are not being adhered  
20 to, and students are placed more or less for subjective  
21 reasons.

22 I didn't want to talk too much. I wanted to  
23 leave time because I wanted to hear what you have to  
24 say tonight. I wanted to hear what your concerns are.  
25 I've heard a little bit earlier today. I've taken a

1 lot of notes, and I'd like to hear more.

2 So, I will be here also tomorrow morning, and  
3 if anyone wants to meet with me while I'm here, let me  
4 know.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause)

7 MR. MACY: Thank you very much, Mr. Pierce.  
8 The material he left, by the way, some of the material  
9 is in Spanish as well as English. So, I hope that you  
10 pick it up. Part of it explains the process of how to  
11 file a complaint which is very important. So, a self-  
12 training booklet on how to get in touch with Mr.  
13 Pierce's office and file a complaint.

14 Before we begin the rest of the program,  
15 which is going to relate to you folks and the panel  
16 coming up and making statements, you can direct it to  
17 anybody on the panel or to the panel in general, and to  
18 the extent we can get answers. If there are questions  
19 that we can't answer, then what -- if they're related  
20 to Mr. Shamas, then what we're going to do is to have  
21 Mr. Shamas get us answers so that when we make our  
22 report, we can have answers in it.

23 Just wait one minute, please. Before we  
24 start this, one of the serious complaints we heard  
25 during the day today was lack of money, and obviously

1 which is very important, and we're very fortunate to  
2 have with us today one of the state representatives  
3 from Bridgeport, Bernie Newton. Oh, he left. Just  
4 when we were going to get to him. Well, I didn't want  
5 to interrupt the speakers to introduce anyone.

6 Oh, who -- oh, come on up. We have another  
7 panelist that is here. This panelist is Kim  
8 McLaughlin, who is, as you can see, a co-founder of  
9 Education First.

10 So, Kim?

11 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Thank you.

12 I'm very sorry I was late tonight. I  
13 apologize. Something came up at home.

14 So, I want to thank all of you from the  
15 Commission for the opportunity to speak this evening.  
16 I think this is a very important step in Bridgeport for  
17 us as we are working very hard to try and take a  
18 serious look at improving the school system for our  
19 children of Bridgeport.

20 My name's Kim McLaughlin, and I have an 11-  
21 year-old daughter who's a student in the Bridgeport  
22 school system, and for about the last year, I've been  
23 very active with an organization called Education  
24 First, and this is an organization of parents,  
25 guardians, neighbors, friends, family of children who

1 attend the Bridgeport school system.

2 We're an independent organization. Our money  
3 is we raise our own money through fund-raisers. We get  
4 no money from anyone connected to the city or the state  
5 or the Board of Education. We think that's very  
6 important because we need to be able to speak about  
7 anything and everything that affects our children and  
8 not be afraid to -- of some of the things that we might  
9 say that might affect our jobs or things like that.

10 We are very dedicated to organizing and  
11 developing and maintaining constituency for educational  
12 excellence in Bridgeport.

13 Now, I just want to let you know quickly our  
14 mission statement because then I think what I then say  
15 will make a little bit more sense. In our mission  
16 statement, we talk about the fact that many of the  
17 decisions, too many of the decisions that affect our  
18 children's education seem to be based in Bridgeport on  
19 political decisions, not in the best interests of our  
20 children but in the best interests of those who are in  
21 power here in Bridgeport and also the political  
22 machine, that it really has become an institutionalized  
23 system that feeds those things, and our children are  
24 not first, and they're not the first priority, and they  
25 don't get the attention that they deserve.

1           So, that's really what we were all about.  
2           That's why we formed our organization, and we believe  
3           that as parents, we have to be the first ones ahead of  
4           everybody else to be pushing that the decisions here in  
5           Bridgeport for education are made because of our  
6           children.

7           Anyway, I wanted to let you know that and  
8           tell you that we believe that who is in power, and  
9           that's politics, I know that's a dirty word and you may  
10          not want to hear it, but I think that you need to hear  
11          that because here in Bridgeport as many other cities,  
12          if those who are in power can use the system to  
13          continue their power, and what's happened in Bridgeport  
14          is that the political machine is used to reward and  
15          punish people, and in order to maintain the balance of  
16          power.

17          If you look at the positions of who's been in  
18          power and who's held the positions of power over the  
19          last 20 years here in the City of Bridgeport, the  
20          pattern becomes very clear, I think, and the pattern  
21          that we have seen is that those who are in control of  
22          the power structure here in Bridgeport. They're white  
23          by far, those who are in control of the power  
24          structure. They're wealthy, and they do not have  
25          children in the public school system, and those who are



1 not wealthy and who are generally not white, in fact  
2 the majority are not white, are the children in the  
3 school system, and what we believe is that there has  
4 been very willful neglect on the part of the system.

5 It is not as Mr. Shamas said here today. I'm  
6 glad I'm coming after him because what I heard him say  
7 was it was benign neglect. Gee, we didn't know. Gee,  
8 you know, we want to change. Give us another chance.  
9 Well, we certainly want to give people another chance,  
10 but it has to be very clear that this is -- if you look  
11 at the pattern, and I assume that's what you all are  
12 looking at, that -- and as Mr. Pierce actually said was  
13 what you all were looking at, then in fact there has  
14 been wilful neglect.

15 What I want to tell you is that there are two  
16 Bridgeports. As I know there's two Connecticut, there  
17 also are two Bridgeports. One is connected with the  
18 power and the wealth in the city, and the other is  
19 regular people like me and like other people here. I  
20 know I'm a different color than the majority of the  
21 people that may be in the public school systems, but  
22 the other Bridgeport is made up of people like myself.

23 We do not have wealth. We do not have power.  
24 We are not connected to those in power. We go to work  
25 every day. We come home. We try to lead decent lives,

1 and if you look at the city, you will see that where  
2 money has been pumped into the city, it's in those  
3 areas that affect the people who are in positions of  
4 wealth or are connected to wealth and connected to  
5 power, and it's very clear that the children in the  
6 public school system are in the other Bridgeport.  
7 That's really what this is all about.

8           You will not see flowers and trees in front  
9 of the public schools in Bridgeport. I don't know if  
10 you're planning to do a tour, but I think it would be  
11 worth your while to take a look at the schools. They  
12 are barren. In many cases, no flowers, no trees, no  
13 shrubs, and yet there's a \$1 million-a-year Clean and  
14 Green Program paid for in many ways -- much of it's  
15 paid with our taxpayers' money, and none of the trees,  
16 none of the flowers, none of the improvements, none of  
17 the brick sidewalks have gone anywhere near our  
18 children's schools. I think that says a lot right  
19 there.

20           You'll see a \$300,000 structure right smack  
21 off the entrance off the main highway, where all the  
22 people, the commuters come down. \$300,000 that quite  
23 frankly could have gone to improvements in our  
24 children's schools.

25           So, I think that you need to take a look at

1 that. You need to take a look at where the money has  
2 gone, and money does speak of where the priorities are.  
3 Our children are not the priorities. This is not  
4 individual isolated cases of abuse, neglect and  
5 mistreatment. This is systemic, absolutely systemic  
6 mistreatment and neglect, and it is not benign. It is  
7 very, very targeted, and it's very -- it's had a lot of  
8 thought gone into it.

9 Well, now that I've said that, let me just  
10 give you a couple examples, so I can show you what I  
11 mean.

12 Here's some examples of outward systemic  
13 neglect in Bridgeport that point the finger at racism,  
14 classism, people who have no money, and who are not  
15 white. That's what we see every day.

16 At our school, there are not enough textbooks  
17 to go around, but we have a \$300,000 pergola at the  
18 entrance to our highway. At our school, the home for  
19 the art and the music teachers is in the first floor  
20 hallway.

21 At Dunbar School, the hallway walls are  
22 grimy. They're filthy. When you walk outside, there's  
23 birds nests in the lights, so that it's a fire hazard  
24 if you turn the outside lights on in the evening for  
25 the after-school programs that Mr. Shamas talked about.

1 It's actually against the fire codes. It hasn't been  
2 cleaned.

3 At Beardsley School, the building occupancy  
4 is approximately a 120 percent. At Hall School,  
5 there's not one inch, take a look at this school,  
6 there's not one inch of grass, flowers, trees, nothing,  
7 absolutely nothing. The front door's cracked. It's  
8 been cracked for quite a long time, has not been  
9 replaced. There are windows in the front of the  
10 building that are cracked, have not been replaced.

11 At Columbus School, the reading tutor works  
12 with students in a converted closet. At Maplewood  
13 Annex, special education students that have been  
14 assessed for speech therapy needs, they are not getting  
15 the hours that they're supposed to get each week  
16 because there's not enough speech therapists to go  
17 around.

18 At High Horizons, one of the magnet schools  
19 which we think, you know, should be getting the best of  
20 the best or at least that's what the theory is, there's  
21 a special education class there with 19 students, no  
22 aide, and they have had a permanent full-time  
23 substitute teacher. It's her first year, you know,  
24 first time ever doing this. She's new at it, and  
25 that's been going on since October. You can imagine

1 that's a lot cheaper for the system. It's not better  
2 for our children.

3 We have less than one percent of the fourth  
4 graders in that school met the state goals on  
5 Connecticut mastery tests last year. It can't be that  
6 every child is a problem or stupid child. That's not  
7 possible.

8 At Kiria, at Kiria School, 1.6 percent of the  
9 sixth graders met the state goal, and I have to tell  
10 you the state goals are not that high. I'm not sure if  
11 you're familiar with that, but they're not very high.  
12 I mean, you know, at Kiria, 1.6 percent of the sixth  
13 graders met the state goal on all three Connecticut  
14 mastery tests last year. It can't be that all the  
15 students at Kiria are stupid. It just can't be.

16 At Vassick High School, one of our three high  
17 schools, not one single student in the 10th grade met  
18 the goals of the state mastery test on all four of the  
19 tests. Not a single student. I'm taking this from, by  
20 the way, from the '98-99 statistical report to the  
21 state. So, that's where those figures come from.  
22 They're actual figures that the Board of Education has  
23 submitted.

24 Now, I could go on and on. I'm sure you  
25 don't want me to, and I won't, but I have to tell you

1 that these are not isolated examples. There are  
2 literally thousands of these statistics and these  
3 stories that have been gone on and on and on, and  
4 they're really just the tip of the iceberg.

5 That's one of the reasons our group formed,  
6 is we needed, we wanted and we have been highlighting  
7 them, bringing them out, pushing them and making sure  
8 people understand there is a huge discrepancy in the  
9 education of our children, and the children of -- the  
10 education of children in other parts of this state, and  
11 that someone has to take -- pay attention to that.

12 There are two other things I want to take a  
13 look -- have you hear some examples on because I know  
14 that's what you're looking for. So, if we look beyond  
15 just the examples that I gave you of systemic neglect,  
16 not benign neglect, systemic neglect, there's another  
17 thing that seems to be -- that I have bumped into over  
18 the last year that greatly disturbs me, and that is  
19 that when parents or neighbors or friends or even  
20 staff, I've talked to teachers and aides, when they  
21 speak up and bring up these cases and bring up these  
22 examples -- I cannot, obviously cannot speak more  
23 eloquently than Mrs. McCabe, but I have a couple  
24 additional examples. I'm sorry. McGhee. Okay. Well,  
25 it's Mc, right?

1           So, at one of -- and I'm not going to name  
2 schools or particular people obviously to protect the  
3 individuals involved, but at one of Bridgeport's  
4 elementary schools, the school social worker, I  
5 overheard this, told a parent who was advocating for  
6 her special needs child, very assertive but not  
7 aggressive, that she really shouldn't be so assertive  
8 because if she kept up with this behavior, she would be  
9 labeled a troublemaker, and that then that would come  
10 back to haunt her son and cause her son a lot more  
11 trouble in the school.

12           At another elementary school, we had a woman  
13 who was involved and was coming to our meetings. She's  
14 a parent. She's also an aide in the school system.  
15 So, she's an employee, and she stopped coming to  
16 meetings. So, I asked her what happened, and she said,  
17 "I loved coming to your meetings, but you know what?  
18 After the second meeting I came to, I was called in to  
19 the principal's office the next morning and told  
20 that" -- "I was given a piece of advice by the  
21 principal, which was don't bite the hand that feeds  
22 you."

23           Well, we know what that means, right? It's a  
24 threat. So, those are just two examples of the  
25 intimidation, subtle but not so subtle, if you're

1 raising your family on the salary that you make as a  
2 single parent in that position. It is not subtle.  
3 We're all smart people. We know what that means.

4 Those are just two examples. I certainly  
5 have a lot more, and I'd be more than willing to share  
6 them if there's any interest --

7 MR. MACY: What we would like, also, as we  
8 mentioned before, is a written statement, so that you  
9 can expand --

10 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Yes.

11 MR. MACY: -- and edit or whatever you wish  
12 to do with your statement, and it should be mailed, as  
13 I mentioned before, --

14 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Okay.

15 MR. MACY: -- in your folder that you  
16 received is the Office of the United States Commission  
17 on Civil Rights in Washington. You send it to the  
18 attention of Dr. Ki-Taek Chun, and we'll add it to our  
19 materials.

20 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Okay. Great. Now, are  
21 those statements confidential? I tell you why I ask  
22 you --

23 MR. MACY: No.

24 MS. McLAUGHLIN: No? Okay.

25 MR. MACY: You're a panelist. You're making



1 a statement, and obviously it's not confidential. It's  
2 a statement that you've made, --

3 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Right.

4 MR. MACY: -- and we would print it. I mean,  
5 we have a record, but what we want to do is give you an  
6 opportunity to review it. When we get a written  
7 statement, that is the statement that we will go by.

8 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Okay.

9 MR. MACY: So, that's important.

10 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I'm sorry. I didn't  
11 articulate myself well. I didn't mean was my statement  
12 confidential, but if the people that I just spoke about  
13 with no names at no school, I'm sure they would be --

14 MR. MACY: That's fine.

15 MS. McLAUGHLIN: -- interested in submitting  
16 testimony, if it was confidential. Obviously their  
17 jobs would be at risk.

18 MR. MACY: Ki-Taek?

19 DR. CHUN: That is a delicate point, but let  
20 me try to do justice to the concerns that you're  
21 raising.

22 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Okay.

23 DR. CHUN: The best -- one thing we can do is  
24 we can cite whatever information you provide and  
25 reference it to autonomous or we can explain why the

1       anonymity.

2               MS. McLAUGHLIN:   Okay.

3               DR. CHUN:   Because people who supply the  
4       information are concerned about possible retaliation  
5       and so on.

6               MS. McLAUGHLIN:   Okay.

7               DR. CHUN:   Now, oftentimes that is  
8       sufficient, but if any legal action is taken, either  
9       way, and the agency is -- Civil Rights Commission is  
10      called by law to explicate the source, then I don't  
11      think we have the kind of protection that the press  
12      might have.   So, we have far less.

13              MS. McLAUGHLIN:   Okay.

14              DR. CHUN:   Now, having said that, though, I'd  
15      like to add not to discourage you, if you provide, say,  
16      "confidential" information, I think we will make  
17      discreet use of it in some --

18              MS. McLAUGHLIN:   Okay.

19              DR. CHUN:   -- effective fashion.

20              MS. McLAUGHLIN:   Okay.

21              DR. CHUN:   There is a gentleman from Office  
22      of Civil Rights, the U.S. Attorney's Office.   There are  
23      a million other agencies we can refer the cases to, and  
24      I think I'd like to be -- I would like to say that we  
25      cannot guarantee in the legal sense, but a certain

1 degree of confidentiality that you can feel  
2 comfortable.

3 So, I'd like to encourage whatever  
4 information you can provide. You know, we are not out  
5 to get anybody, but we are interested in creating a  
6 climate wherein the kind of dialogue that  
7 Superintendent Shamas has referred to, so that people  
8 can become freer, and everybody becomes aware that  
9 there are people outside Bridgeport who are getting  
10 interested in this, --

11 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Right.

12 DR. CHUN: -- and, you know, when the report  
13 hits the national scene, it's going to become a  
14 national sort of issue, and, so, when it registers on  
15 the national radar screen, that's when things become --  
16 takes on different characteristics, and it's no longer  
17 a Bridgeport issue.

18 MR. MACY: Mr. Pierce, did you want to add  
19 anything to that?

20 MR. PIERCE: Sure. I can address that, too.

21 First of all, one of the brochures that is  
22 included in the packet, this one, it talks about how to  
23 file a complaint, and again if you weren't here  
24 earlier, there are copies of a variety of pamphlets  
25 from our office on that back table. So, be sure to

1 take them all. I don't want to have to take any back.

2 But, anyway, in this brochure about filing  
3 complaints, it mentions that retaliation is prohibited  
4 by the law, and even though it is prohibited by the  
5 law, it sometimes occurs. We sometimes get follow-up  
6 complaints where complainants allege that because they  
7 filed a complaint because they have been retaliated  
8 against.

9 So, I just wanted to point that out, that  
10 even though it's prohibited, it does occur. We do  
11 investigate it. We rarely find it to be true. It's  
12 hard to prove sometimes. We have proved it but not in  
13 many cases.

14 But as far as the issue of confidentiality,  
15 some complaints, some kinds of complaints, we need  
16 personally-identifiable information in order to  
17 investigate it. In order to investigate certain  
18 complaints, you've got to ask for information that will  
19 identify a person, and we do require signed complaints.

20 We don't accept anonymous complaints. Any  
21 complaint that we accept has to be signed. It has to  
22 be in writing, but the complaints are covered by two  
23 different laws that are somewhat in conflict with each  
24 other.

25 One is the Freedom of Information Act, which

1 means that our system of records is available to  
2 requesters, like the press or like the individuals who  
3 might ask for copies of it, and we are obligated to  
4 provide that under that particular law.

5 Now, there's another law that's a little bit  
6 in conflict with that, which is the Privacy Act, which  
7 means that personally-identifiable information would  
8 not be divulged. We would not release documents that  
9 would have names in it. We would delete those names.  
10 We'd black them out, redact them is what we call it, in  
11 the records, and try to remove other information other  
12 than names that might identify a person.

13 So, we do take pains to try to prevent any  
14 kind of unreasonable breach of a person's privacy, and  
15 the reason we do that is to try to prevent anybody from  
16 being retaliated against, but we know that it does  
17 occur, and if we get a complaint alleging that it has  
18 occurred, we will look into it and try to determine  
19 whether it in fact had occurred.

20 MR. MACY: Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

21 Kim, why don't you grab a seat back there?

22 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I just had a couple more  
23 things. I'll -- I won't take much longer, but I just  
24 want to add one more thing.

25 MR. MACY: Very quickly.

1 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Okay. Very quickly. One of  
2 the last things I just wanted to ask that you take a  
3 look at when you're looking at Bridgeport is where do  
4 the public school administrators come down? Where do  
5 the people in the administration, where do they fit  
6 into the equation, and I just want to give you a couple  
7 examples of what we view as abuse with respect to that.

8 And again, I'm going to be careful on names  
9 and places, but at one of the Bridgeport elementary  
10 schools, a full-time Board of Education employee spends  
11 much of her time on a Board of Ed cell phone doing  
12 political business, and that is -- it's a commonly-  
13 known fact. She has her own office, and she uses it  
14 to, you know, continue her -- further her efforts, her  
15 political efforts.

16 Another case is that one of the top BOE  
17 administrators is in charge of mediating abuse cases,  
18 alleged abuse cases, if a child complains that a  
19 teacher touched them or hurt them or abused them, and  
20 it just so happens that several weeks ago, there was a  
21 case against his son, and he did not step aside as a  
22 conflict of interest. He was the mediator in the case,  
23 and I'm not trying to point fingers that the son did  
24 abuse. I have no idea. It doesn't matter, but it  
25 seems to me that there's got to be some proper actions

1 taken in conflict of interest in a case like that.

2 So, that's just another thing I wanted to  
3 bring to your attention. So, I'll end my remarks. I  
4 appreciate you hearing me out.

5 MR. MACY: Thank you.

6 MS. McLAUGHLIN: Thanks very much.

7 MR. MACY: Thank you.

8 (Applause)

9 MR. MACY: The hour is getting a little late.  
10 There are a lot of parents here with children, and  
11 rather than the committee asking any questions at this  
12 time, I'm going to defer to the parents.

13 I just want to make one statement. This is  
14 like a book I read in high school. It's called "A Tale  
15 of Two Cities", and it was the best of times and the  
16 worst of times, and I think that I've heard both  
17 tonight.

18 So, without taking any further time, I want  
19 to start with the panel. One question? On procedure?  
20 Okay.

21 AUDIENCE: Could we perhaps let the parents  
22 who have children here tonight go first?

23 MR. MACY: That's what I said.

24 AUDIENCE: Okay.

25 MR. MACY: That's what I wanted to start

1 with. I want to let the parents with children who may  
2 have to leave come for -- what we want you to do is  
3 come up to the podium, state your name for the group,  
4 so the court reporter can get it, and make your  
5 statement, and what we would appreciate if you could do  
6 later on, if you want to give it to us in writing, you  
7 can mail it, as I mentioned, to Dr. Ki-Taek Chun at the  
8 Washington office, and we'll make sure it's  
9 incorporated the way you want. Okay?

10 Parent Number 1?

11 AUDIENCE: My name is Ana Garcia. I'm the  
12 mother of a daughter, and she also attends to the  
13 Bridgeport public schools.

14 I am -- I kind of have a complaint in to the  
15 way that my daughter in her school, there was a man  
16 that was touching her private parts, and --

17 MR. MACY: An employee?

18 AUDIENCE: Yes, an employee. We had actually  
19 taken this to the Board of Education, and the CYS is  
20 also taking care of this matter. But I would like to  
21 ask, I'm not sure who takes care of the custodians and  
22 people that are actually hired for these type of jobs  
23 in the Board of Education.

24 I would like to know how much are they  
25 screened, and how much their background is actually



1 checked to see if prior to these cases, there has been  
2 any other cases actually --

3 MR. MACY: That's a good question. I think  
4 that can be answered very easily because many of us who  
5 are in public education are familiar with it.

6 We have a law that mandates there must be a  
7 police check before an employee is hired. We  
8 fingerprint them. They fill out a statement. We find  
9 out whether they've ever been convicted of any crime.  
10 All this is done, and now that doesn't mean that  
11 someone may not slip through the whole system.

12 However, I can tell you that's one of the  
13 most serious things that, if you call the Office of  
14 Human Resources or Personnel, that is supposed to do,  
15 is just to check for that, and I know in the past  
16 years, that people have changed their names. They've  
17 come from other states, changed their names, but we --  
18 to the extent possible, I'm sure you'll agree, Mr.  
19 Shamas, that that is an important priority.

20 AUDIENCE: Also, I believe he was only  
21 transferred somewhere else. I should -- I believe that  
22 that person should have been terminated from the Board  
23 of Education.

24 MR. MACY: Would you give Mr. -- so, we don't  
25 mention the name in public, would you give Mr. Shamas

1 his name before we leave, so that he can check it out  
2 and then get back to you?

3 MR. SHAMAS: I'm familiar with the situation.

4 MR. MACY: Oh, okay. That's even better.

5 MR. SHAMAS: I'm familiar with the situation.  
6 Obviously we're not going to get into details because  
7 the investigation is going on, but my understanding was  
8 that the parent was notified by the school  
9 administration what was done and were quite pleased  
10 with the swift action that was taken, but that's --

11 AUDIENCE: Okay. I'm the parent of one of  
12 the girls that that happened to, and the only thing  
13 that they let us know was that he was just transferred  
14 somewhere else where there was no kids. That's all  
15 they told us.

16 MR. MACY: You can talk later on. Thank you  
17 very much.

18 AUDIENCE: Thank you.

19 MR. MACY: Parent Number 2?

20 AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Louisa Gonzalez,  
21 and I'm a parent, same situation that went on with my  
22 daughter. She was one of the other -- my daughter was  
23 the second one that was --

24 MR. MACY: In the same school?

25 AUDIENCE: The same school, and I was very

1       upset because I found this out like after they, you  
2       know, talked to my daughter and everything, and then  
3       they called my house, and they just told me the same  
4       thing, that they would take care of it, and I told them  
5       that I would like for me and my husband to go for a  
6       meeting to, you know, get to see what was going to go  
7       on, but they didn't tell me nothing.

8                They were just saying don't worry about it,  
9       we'll take care of it, and that was all that I heard  
10      about it.

11             MR. MACY:   And without going into the name,  
12      has that person been transferred or has he been  
13      suspended and out of the school since the incident,  
14      until it's completed?

15             MR. SHAMAS:  Exactly right.

16             MR. MACY:   Which?

17             MR. SHAMAS:  The latter.

18             MR. MACY:   Oh, okay.  So, he hasn't been  
19      transferred, he has been suspended?

20             MR. SHAMAS:  And the investigation right now  
21      between the Board of Education and the Department of  
22      Children and Family Services is on-going.

23             MR. MACY:   Okay.  Next, Parent Number 3?

24             AUDIENCE:   My name is Betsy Nieves, and my  
25      child is the third child this man had touched, also in

1 the same school, same person, and I was also given the  
2 same information, not to worry about it, he was taken  
3 care of. I don't know what that meant. He was removed  
4 and was placed elsewhere.

5 No one ever called the police and had me file  
6 a complaint. I still haven't, and I was -- I'm very  
7 upset because every time I go to the school, and I try  
8 to get someone to help my daughter, my daughter's one  
9 of the children who is not at her reading level, and I  
10 keep telling the reading teacher, when are you going to  
11 take her, and you can ask her, she'll tell you we keep  
12 asking him, and he keeps saying next week, next week,  
13 next week, and she never gets the attention that she's  
14 supposed to get.

15 MR. MACY: Ms. Nieves, a question I forgot to  
16 ask the other two. When did this series of incidents  
17 take place? How long ago in time?

18 AUDIENCE: It was going on for a month, but  
19 the girls were afraid.

20 MR. MACY: Which month?

21 AUDIENCE: Last month.

22 MR. MACY: Last month.

23 AUDIENCE: And then last week, they decided  
24 to tell the assistant principal who they were very --  
25 they're very, very close to. All this was going on in

1 the after-school program. This man had access to our  
2 children with no one else there, without us knowing.  
3 We're thinking they're at the after-school program  
4 doing their homework, sitting down with the teacher or  
5 something, and here's this man touching our little  
6 girls, and they're afraid. They didn't know what to  
7 do. They were scared. They were crying, and they  
8 decided to tell something they felt comfortable with.

9 MR. MACY: Thank you. Pat?

10 MR. JOHNSON: Just a quick question. Has the  
11 school offered any specific counseling to these  
12 children or guidance to the parents relative to this  
13 experience?

14 AUDIENCE: No, no. They just said they would  
15 take care of it, and that was that.

16 MR. JOHNSON: Thank you.

17 MR. MACY: Did you want to add something?  
18 No? Okay. Thank you.

19 Is that accurate? Have they offered  
20 counseling to the parents and children, Mr. Shamas?  
21 Can you find out?

22 MS. JOHNSON: Can I respond?

23 MR. MACY: Rebecca?

24 MS. JOHNSON: This is not an underhanded  
25 attempt to get more than my 11 minutes, but I've had

1 the -- I've had the privilege of speaking with one of  
2 the parents in this situation, and I'm not going to go  
3 into a whole lot of detail, but I will say that I think  
4 that the treatment that these parents have been  
5 subjected to is indicative of the lack of respect and  
6 the condescending attitude that parents face every day  
7 when they go to the school to speak to principals or  
8 the teachers, whether it's a situation where the child  
9 is not getting the kind of attention that they need, so  
10 that they can succeed in their academic studies,  
11 whether it's a situation where a parent is going to ask  
12 a principal a question.

13 I think that the sum and some -- and I'm not  
14 going to criticize every teacher, every principal,  
15 because I don't think everybody in the system is bad,  
16 but you have too many bad seeds, and what happens when  
17 a parent goes to demand information that should be  
18 provided to them, they're turned away, and they're  
19 turned away in a very rude and condescending manner,  
20 and I find it troubling.

21 I'm hearing complaints on a weekly basis.  
22 I'm approached by new parents to the point where I  
23 almost can't sleep at night because the stories echo in  
24 my mind, the conversations that I have with these  
25 parents, and I am sick and tired of the condescending,

1       nasty, nasty attitudes, even to the point where some  
2       parents who go to school very frustrated and go in  
3       assertive manners, as one of the speakers said, and  
4       what happens is the police are called on them, and  
5       they're escorted out the building.

6                I can't tell you how many parents have had  
7       police called on them, and they're escorted out the  
8       building because they're trying to address some concern  
9       that they have, and what these ladies have said is just  
10      indicative of a pattern of conduct on the part of  
11      school administrators who are predominantly white, and  
12      these parents are predominantly black and Hispanic, and  
13      they're treated like -- I think we forget that you're  
14      taking someone's most prized possession, and you're --  
15      this is how the parent views it, and this is how the  
16      administrators view it.

17               MR. MACY: Are there any other parents, first  
18      of all, before we go into other people in the audience  
19      that have young children that might want to leave?

20               AUDIENCE: Dr. Macy, the young lady just said  
21      she wants to talk.

22               MR. MACY: Yes. Okay. Sure. Give us your  
23      names, first of all, so -- and clearly, so the court  
24      stenographer can get it.

25               AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Kayla Gonzalez,

1 and I'm -- I just want to know -- I just want to tell  
2 you that we used to have a job in the after-school  
3 program cleaning the tables, and our reward was we used  
4 to go to his office and get candy, and when we used to  
5 go to his office, he used to hug us in a way that he  
6 used to bring down his hand and touch us in the wrong  
7 way, and he used to act like nothing had happened, but  
8 one day, he tried to touch me in the wrong way, and I  
9 told him to stop, and he didn't give us candy, and I'm  
10 very scared that he's going to come back and do  
11 something worse than what he did.

12 MR. MACY: Mr. Shamas?

13 MR. SHAMAS: He will not come back.

14 MR. MACY: And one thing I'm sure your mother  
15 has told you, you never accept candy from strangers.

16 AUDIENCE: But this was not a stranger.

17 MR. MACY: Well, it is.

18 AUDIENCE: He was a person they trusted.

19 AUDIENCE: My name is Joyce Nieves, and what  
20 she said was true, because she -- he did actually touch  
21 us in the wrong way, and it was very uncomfortable, and  
22 when -- once my friend Desiree, she was walking with a  
23 rag on her little -- on her pants, on the little hole  
24 that you put the belt through, and he went to get the  
25 rag, but he did it on purpose, and he grabbed her the



1 wrong way there, and then once, he pulled her by the  
2 shirt to sit on his lap, and all the time, you know, he  
3 tried to do stuff that was bad.

4 MR. MACY: Could you speak just a little  
5 louder, please?

6 AUDIENCE: All the time he tried to do  
7 something bad to us, right, and then we said no, he  
8 used to not like give us candy, like in a mean way he  
9 used to say it.

10 AUDIENCE: Hello. My name is Desiree Chavez.  
11 I just wanted to say that I feel very uncomfortable  
12 that this man was touching me in this way, and I --

13 AUDIENCE: Take your time.

14 AUDIENCE: I was going to say something else.

15 MR. MACY: Take your time. Don't feel  
16 pressure.

17 AUDIENCE: And one time I tried to stop, he  
18 turned very serious, and he left his room. He --  
19 sorry. I'm very scared.

20 MR. MACY: Okay. That's all right. Thank  
21 you very much, young ladies.

22 Are there any other parents --

23 (Applause)

24 MR. MACY: -- here? Why don't we start with  
25 others from the audience? Young lady, did you want to

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1       come up? And from what I heard, you're Danielle's  
2       daughter.

3               AUDIENCE: I'm Kelly Ortiz. I'm 13 years  
4       old. When I was in sixth grade, my teacher assaulted  
5       me. He used to call me names. He used to do a whole  
6       lot of things to other people, too, not just only me,  
7       and since this day on, I have been disrespected of by  
8       others and not having respect for other people because  
9       of what he did to me, and there's a lot of -- he also  
10      broke my fingers, and I can't put it back in.

11              So, that's like a permanent for life. I  
12      remember him because of my finger, and what I had  
13      heard, he has three-week suspension with pay. That was  
14      not right. Three weeks with pay. That's like a  
15      vacation with pay, and what he did to me was -- that's  
16      for life. This is for life.

17              MR. MACY: Is he back teaching at your school  
18      now?

19              AUDIENCE: No. I went to another school.

20              MR. MACY: Oh, you go to another school.

21              MS. JOHNSON: He went back to school at the  
22      same school after his three-week vacation, in quotation  
23      marks.

24              MR. MACY: Did you ever get the results --

25              MS. JOHNSON: Litigation is pending.

1 MR. MACY: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

2 MS. JOHNSON: And the gentleman is now  
3 teaching at another school. He had his position  
4 transferred at his own bidding, basically.

5 MR. MACY: Thank you very much, young man.  
6 Are there any other students here? You're not the  
7 student, you're the mother.

8 AUDIENCE: Yes. My name is Teresa Russell.  
9 I'm concerned about how special ed. children are being  
10 treated. I have a 13-year old son that's been in  
11 special ed. He has been changed schools five times in  
12 the last five years, and he was -- the last time, he  
13 was switched to a school that was a day care center,  
14 and they were put in a room that was adjacent to a  
15 cafeteria with all these distractions.

16 He had a substitute teacher who was -- he  
17 wasn't a real teacher, we found out. So, we -- me and  
18 a couple other parents, we picketed the school, and we  
19 had the tv stations and everything there, and they  
20 moved him to another school, and the result was they  
21 had to finish out the school year in that school, but  
22 they, you know, closed it down so they wouldn't have  
23 the other kids going there, and I just think this was a  
24 violation of his rights last year.

25 It seems like he missed a whole year of

1 school because of this, because he wasn't taught right  
2 by a teacher that doesn't know anything about special  
3 ed.

4 MR. MACY: Did you make a complaint to the  
5 Board of Education?

6 AUDIENCE: We had like five parents that, you  
7 know, got together, and we all did. We even went to  
8 Legal Aid and everything about it.

9 MR. MACY: And nothing has happened?

10 AUDIENCE: No.

11 MR. MACY: Okay. Thank you. Why don't you  
12 come up, Ms. Robles? This is Danielle's mother, who's  
13 on our panel.

14 AUDIENCE: I'm also with Education First.

15 MR. MACY: Okay.

16 AUDIENCE: I wanted to mention that, also,  
17 and I also work for the City of Bridgeport, the Health  
18 Department. I'm a public health nurse in one of the  
19 schools.

20 First of all, I have to say that I'm very  
21 sorry to all those young ladies and the young man who  
22 was here. I think it's shameful that things like that  
23 are allowed to happen.

24 But I do want to speak about the treatment of  
25 parents because my daughter went to Central High School

1 since 1996-1997, and there was a time when I was very  
2 involved there, and even though these issues are not as  
3 serious, and by no means am I trying to say this is  
4 more important than what we just heard because I think  
5 those issues are definitely more serious, especially  
6 special ed. and maltreatment of children.

7 But in 1996-97, I started going to Board of  
8 Ed. meetings and talking about the conditions of the  
9 school my daughter goes to, and I could tell that I was  
10 not being heard, and I was not getting any action.

11 I had to keep going back, and I had to start  
12 a paper trail. My husband and I, my sister, my very  
13 small group of parents, got together and took pictures  
14 and started the paper trail, and we started asking for  
15 accountability and time lines, and still with all that  
16 getting very little results.

17 I thought it was interesting the way they  
18 reacted to me because they felt I shouldn't have been  
19 there, and I was causing too much trouble. I was a  
20 joke.

21 One of the most famous jokes were the 1964  
22 maps that they had hanging, and they had maps that were  
23 current in 1997, which they paid \$97,000 for, but they  
24 just happened to forget to put them up. So, I, of  
25 course, was wondering what was the problem. So, there

1 were a great deal of problems, and at that time, I  
2 believe Mr. Shamas was the associate superintendent of  
3 schools before he retired.

4 We had issues like the roof, the locker  
5 rooms, toxic chemicals that were not removed in a  
6 timely fashion, and we had to develop a relationship  
7 with the principal and, of course, with other parent  
8 organizations, Board of Ed. members, to try to find a  
9 way so that we were heard.

10 So, when communication is mentioned, when  
11 they say parents and also staff need to care more, I  
12 think there are a lot of parents that do care, and I  
13 think a lot of parents have been turned away, and  
14 because of that apathy, because of that lack of  
15 consciousness and no respect and no support for the  
16 parent, doors are shut, and I can tell you many doors  
17 were shut for me, but I happen to be a pest, and I kept  
18 going back, and the PTSO has grown, and the parents  
19 have grown, and Education First gave us a great deal of  
20 leadership, and we are going to homes, and we're  
21 helping parents become their own advocates, and we're  
22 getting together and making changes or trying to make  
23 changes.

24 But we need a lot of help because this is a  
25 system that is used to doing everything the way they

1 want to do it, no matter who complains, no matter what  
2 we say.

3 Parents have been here before our time and  
4 have not been listened to, and sometimes I get a little  
5 emotional because it is upsetting to me. I had a  
6 parent once get up in a Board of Ed. meeting  
7 complaining about how in the school, in the bathrooms,  
8 and this woman began to cry, and I remember because I  
9 was that very same parent a few years before, and  
10 everyone told me that I was not telling the truth. So,  
11 I took pictures, and I brought them to the meetings.

12 The other point about the maintenance issues,  
13 and I seem to always get stuck with the maintenance  
14 issues, but by no means do I want you to think that  
15 academics is not very important to me, and I will get  
16 to that.

17 But let's begin with maintenance, and we're  
18 talking about custodial staff, and we're talking about  
19 glaziers and painters, and we need to find out how many  
20 glaziers actually work for the system, how many  
21 painters work for the system.

22 I think you'll be very surprised at the  
23 numbers. There are not enough people working in order  
24 to support these schools and maintain them. There's  
25 just not enough people. That's in maintenance. We

1 don't even begin to talk about the support staff.

2 When you're talking about psychologists,  
3 social workers and school nurses, I can begin to tell  
4 you that there are not enough people for the children  
5 that we have in these schools, and these issues are  
6 just set aside, and parents have been going to the  
7 Board of Ed. meetings, and they have not been responded  
8 to respectfully nor in a timely fashion.

9 When it comes to upkeep and the grounds, I  
10 think we give our children the message very loud and  
11 clear that we don't care for them, and that only in  
12 abusing them and not offering special education the way  
13 we should, but also if you look at the grounds of the  
14 schools, obviously they're not maintained, but let's  
15 look at JFK Stadium, which is Parks and Rec in the  
16 city, and with the Board of Ed.

17 JFK Stadium was a joke. It was so filthy, it  
18 had so much mold, fungus and everything else there,  
19 kids wouldn't even use it and football teams. At  
20 times, they wouldn't even enter it because it was a  
21 horrible mess.

22 Parents kept going back and saying this needs  
23 to be repaired. Are you telling me that in this  
24 system, they don't see this? You have people working,  
25 and they don't see the repairs that need to be done?



1 Who does the checks and balances? Who keeps track?  
2 Who's doing their job? And that's what gets me upset.

3 When you allow a system to totally fail, and  
4 it has totally failed in maintaining buildings in  
5 academics, and you allow that to happen to our  
6 children, how do they expect them to survive and have  
7 successful and productive lives? You can't.

8 So, our children are not surviving, and that  
9 is a big issue for me. When it comes to student  
10 achievement, yes, student achievement is a very high  
11 priority. Well, how high is it when you heard the  
12 statistics that Kim McLaughlin gave you? How high is  
13 it when we're at the bottom of the scale, next to  
14 Hartford and New Haven? How high is student  
15 achievement? That's a question. The dropout rate,  
16 they say, is 25 percent.

17 I ask you to please look carefully, closely  
18 at the dropout rate, really look and see where our  
19 children ranked. Did they go to adult ed. or did they  
20 drop out? Where are they?

21 My daughter's class began with 800. This  
22 year, she may have a graduating class, may have a  
23 graduating class of 350. Where are they? These are  
24 our children. I have one daughter, but these are our  
25 children. Okay. I am limited sometimes in how I can

1 help because I work for the city, but I try to do my  
2 best because I try to fight for the children.

3           Isn't that our goal, and when is someone  
4 going to step up to the plate in this city, including  
5 the mayor, including all the politicians from the  
6 County Council to the Senators to the representatives  
7 to the Board of Ed., when are they going to step up to  
8 the plate and instead of having new city -- now we have  
9 two City Halls, one that is 30 something years old,  
10 looks better than any of the high schools that took its  
11 place.

12           We have a new Board of Ed. building. All  
13 this money being infiltrated into these buildings, and  
14 our children don't have books, some don't even have  
15 adequate computers that work. They have viruses all  
16 over the place. They don't have software. They don't  
17 have chairs or they have broken chairs. They have chem  
18 labs that supposedly were created and all were replaced  
19 with tables.

20           When is someone going to make somebody  
21 accountable and step up to the plate and say this is  
22 wrong, we have to fight for our children, and the right  
23 thing will be done, and it has to change completely.

24           I ask that because the powers-that-be are the  
25 Democratic Party here, and he's friendly way up in

1 Washington, and that's why I ask. What results are we  
2 really going to get?

3 Thank you.

4 MR. MACY: Ms. Robles, you said something  
5 that another parent said before. I didn't have a  
6 chance to ask you about. You said that you feel you  
7 can't speak out because you work for the city.

8 Has there been any kind of a threat that if  
9 you speak out, it could impact your job?

10 AUDIENCE: Well, it wasn't a direct threat.  
11 It was a subtle threat. It was a subtle threat, yes.  
12 But I'm a nurse. So, if they fire me, I don't want to  
13 be fired, --

14 MR. MACY: You can get a job.

15 AUDIENCE: -- I love my job. I try to do the  
16 best in my job. I want to stay in it, but I know I can  
17 get another job. I think it's more important to take  
18 the risk and fight for our children than it is to sit  
19 down and keep quiet, and I have to tell you I get a lot  
20 of support from my friends because it's easy to hide  
21 and to withdraw, and I have to also tell you that I  
22 have a lot of support from my husband because if my  
23 husband were here, you would hear a very different  
24 message than what I'm giving you because he's to the  
25 point where he wants results, and he wants all this

1 talking to stop and give us results, no matter what the  
2 cost.

3 MR. MACY: Thank you very much.

4 AUDIENCE: You're welcome.

5 MR. MACY: Any other parent wishes to come up  
6 and speak?

7 MS. BERMAN: I have a question.

8 MR. MACY: Yes, question? Go ahead, Ros.

9 MS. BERMAN: Have you ever discussed this  
10 with your elected officials in the city?

11 AUDIENCE: Yes. Yes, I have. Christopher  
12 Caruso. He's -- Chris is a state representative, and  
13 actually he was very helpful in accessing monies from  
14 the state in order to get a new roof at Central High  
15 School. The roof -- three-fourths of the building was  
16 leaking all the way to the bottom, and they told us we  
17 had to wait four years maybe, and we -- I sort of  
18 started an uproar because Chris came in, and he said no  
19 way, we're going to get money, but it's that feeling  
20 where, well, that's what they get, you know, who cares,  
21 hack it up, no big deal.

22 MS. BERMAN: You can change that, you can  
23 change that. You're very articulate.

24 AUDIENCE: Excuse me?

25 MS. BERMAN: You're very articulate, and I'm

1 sure that you can mobilize people to be a force and to  
2 promote your agenda which is a very worthwhile agenda.

3 MR. MACY: Lou Bertha, did you want to ask a  
4 question?

5 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: No. I did have a  
6 question to ask because I listened to your daughter and  
7 also heard your remarks.

8 Do you perceive that some of the maintenance  
9 problems or the conditions of the school -- I'm  
10 speaking in terms of maintenance could be due to ethnic  
11 make-up or, I mean, in comparison to other schools or  
12 they're better maintained or are you sharing that --

13 AUDIENCE: Well, I will say that the magnet  
14 schools are more maintained, are better maintained than  
15 the regular schools.

16 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Okay. And is there a  
17 substantial ethnic minority group in them?

18 AUDIENCE: They all have a substantial  
19 minority group.

20 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: I see.

21 AUDIENCE: In Bridgeport, they're basically  
22 all minority. Even though they have like a third of  
23 the -- I think it's a third Latino, a third black, a  
24 third white in the magnet schools. But you will always  
25 find still a high minority ratio in those schools, but

1 the magnet schools are sort of the cream of the crop  
2 children that they tend to cater to and to make sure  
3 they have all the resources so that they have little  
4 higher statistics.

5 If you were to take, for instance, Central  
6 High School and take out Central Magnet and just do the  
7 statistics of Central High School, I think you would  
8 pass out. I think you would pass out.

9 I would also like to mention, since I work  
10 for the Bridgeport Health Department, that when the  
11 OSHA and the state department came in and Environmental  
12 Protection, they recommended two sanitarians because  
13 the schools were never inspected really, and thank God,  
14 the Health Department has to get two sanitarians. We  
15 were hoping the Board of Ed. would also get two  
16 sanitarians, so that they would do regular inspections  
17 of the school, but my issue is let's say you have all  
18 these inspections. Wonderful. What's the follow-up?  
19 What's the time line? Will you report to parents?

20 You know, what follows that? Are they doing  
21 that? And that's what parents don't get the  
22 communication. So, yes, parents go to Board of Ed.  
23 meetings. Parents make issues and concerns. Nothing's  
24 brought back to the table. No one's telling us  
25 anything.

1           We keep asking and asking, and we still don't  
2 get. So, communication is a two-way street. Okay. It  
3 might be four-five actually the way it's going now, but  
4 we need to have it, and we don't have it. We're not a  
5 welcomed entity in the school system. I want to make  
6 sure I said everything.

7           MR. MACY: We'd appreciate getting your  
8 written statement. You have plenty of time to prepare  
9 it for us, if you wish.

10          MS. BERMAN: June 23rd.

11          MR. MACY: June 23rd.

12          AUDIENCE: Okay.

13          MR. MACY: Right.

14          AUDIENCE: That's all. Thank you.

15          MR. MACY: Thank you. Is Mr. Russo here?

16          (Applause)

17          MR. MACY: Mr. Russo?

18          AUDIENCE: It's Caruso.

19          MR. MACY: Caruso. Thank you.

20          AUDIENCE: I know it's the end of your  
21 meeting, so I'll accept that.

22          MR. MACY: Okay.

23          AUDIENCE: Thank you very much. I hadn't  
24 expected to speak this evening. So, excuse my attire.  
25 I would have --

1 MR. MACY: Would you give your full name?

2 AUDIENCE: Yes. It's Christopher Caruso,  
3 State Representative, Bridgeport 126 District, and as I  
4 said, I would have wore a tie out of respect to the  
5 panel here this evening. So, please accept my  
6 apologies.

7 I think what's been said here tonight is  
8 indicative of the feeling that exists within the city  
9 among parents, among people who are concerned about the  
10 education system and, most importantly, among students  
11 who feel a lack of respect, a lack of parental  
12 involvement encouraged by administrators to become  
13 involved, and probably just a sense of what exists in  
14 the city in general and not only in education, but it  
15 seems to transcend into education.

16 We deal with it in the environmental issues,  
17 for example. Our city has a trash energy facility, a  
18 rock-crushing plant. It has other environmental  
19 disasters right in the City of Bridgeport. We deal,  
20 for example, as a city where we pay twice the rates of  
21 insurance and other facilities or opportunities as  
22 other surrounding towns do, and, for example, at one  
23 time, you had an affluent, I should say, constituency  
24 within the city and a poorer constituency, and  
25 education falls almost on that same line.



1           In some neighborhoods, you go, you have  
2 schools that are very well maintained and very well  
3 kept, and you probably have the cream of the teachers  
4 in those schools, and in other schools, you can go down  
5 -- and Bridgeport isn't large, it's only 17 square  
6 feet. So, if you travel to other parts --

7           MR. MACY: You mean miles?

8           AUDIENCE: Miles. It seems like feet at  
9 times. You go down the street, and to another school,  
10 and in a predominantly African American neighborhood,  
11 and the school is in very poor condition, and it isn't  
12 up to the standards that it should be, and that has a  
13 lot to do, I think, with attitudes and how we treat  
14 individuals, how we treat groups of people, and,  
15 frankly, that transcends not only in Bridgeport but it  
16 seems to be epidemic throughout the state, but in  
17 particular where you have suburban and urban boundaries  
18 and how those relate.

19           For example, we put more money, the state  
20 does, into the City of Bridgeport's education than any  
21 other community in the state, and yet there's only 21  
22 percent that the city allocates to education in its  
23 budget, and that to me is a problem.

24           But even besides funding, it's exactly what  
25 we do as people again to try and bridge differences, to

1 try and make parents get more involved or encourage  
2 parents to become more involved, and then what we do  
3 with them once we get them involved.

4 We don't have that, and that's part of the  
5 problem because again there's a mistrust. There's a  
6 consulting firm that's being -- that was put together  
7 to look at the superintendent of schools, and they  
8 honestly stated that it's a system that's mayor-  
9 controlled, and he has a lot of influence in it.  
10 There's the politics that exist, patronage and so forth  
11 that exists within the system, and that was done by an  
12 independent consulting group, and, so, there's a lot of  
13 mistrust in the community as to who will the  
14 superintendent be. Will the superintendent change  
15 things? Will there be a direction that we can see  
16 things happening?

17 But I think if this Commission or this  
18 advisory panel wants to bring anything back to show  
19 that there is definitely disparities in this system,  
20 and I would only encourage -- I don't know if you've  
21 gone out and visited some of the schools, take a chance  
22 to do that.

23 The maintenance problems, and I want to  
24 underscore this, they seemed to be lightly mentioned by  
25 the acting superintendent, they were serious

1 violations. You had the Department of Environmental  
2 Protection on two occasions send notices to the school  
3 system.

4 We were in the middle of the Democratic  
5 primary, and the superintendent of schools at the time  
6 chose not to release that information, and the  
7 president of the Board of Education also knew about it,  
8 and she chose not to release that information. These  
9 are major violations. They were at a point where a  
10 court order would be imposed on the school system  
11 ordered by DEP to the mayor, unless the mayor cleaned  
12 up the situation.

13 Immediately after that Democratic primary,  
14 all hell broke loose. There were meetings in the city  
15 with parents that came to the meeting. Then all of a  
16 sudden, things started to get cleaned up.

17 Now, Roosevelt School in particular. There  
18 were 25 bags of garbage that were in the room off to  
19 the side locked in. This wasn't just summer school  
20 programs. This is garbage that was left there for  
21 months. There was human feces on the gymnasium of the  
22 floor. There was rat droppings on the floor. These  
23 are all things that existed.

24 So, what it underscores to me was a lack of  
25 attention, as Mrs. Robles said, a lack of

1        accountability on the people that we hire to do the job  
2        for our students. It isn't just for the parents, for  
3        the students, and it seems that's where the problem  
4        exists because it's this attitude again that in a  
5        poorer community, and I see this all the time when I  
6        deal with the state, in a poorer community, where  
7        people aren't as educated as they are in more affluent  
8        communities, or because they're made up of a certain  
9        population, whether it be African American or Latino,  
10       that have different cultures and different languages,  
11       we can treat them differently than we do in other  
12       communities.

13                That type of conduct in a suburb like  
14       Fairfield or Westport or West End would not be  
15       accepted. The superintendent at the time would have  
16       been fired. There would have been a shake-up from top  
17       to bottom with the top administrative staff included in  
18       the shake-up, and things would have changed.

19                But in Bridgeport, it was all contained and  
20       kept together until the public erupted, and then at  
21       that point, the outcry was just so much that the  
22       superintendent decided to resign, and, of course, his  
23       health maybe played a part in that.

24                But you see, that's what it takes in the  
25       city, and I don't think Bridgeport's unique. See,

1 that's the interesting thing. I don't think  
2 Bridgeport's unique from New Haven and Hartford.

3 The similarities are. The make-up of those  
4 communities are predominantly African American and  
5 Latino, and that's probably the reason that people  
6 treat the situation the way they do. Again, the  
7 parents are not as politically involved. They don't  
8 have the political wherewithal. They're working in  
9 some cases two or three jobs to support their families.  
10 So, they're not out at all the meetings and all the  
11 events.

12 All of those situations, and, so, when  
13 poverty's there, people take advantage of those and  
14 exploit that poverty, and that's exactly what's  
15 happened in the system, and until we get people in  
16 charge that really are going to be held accountable and  
17 do what they're supposed to do, and that frankly the  
18 government steps in and says things are going wrong,  
19 this situation will continue to exist, and why do you  
20 have the high dropout rate? Because that's part of the  
21 reason.

22 There's something in the system going  
23 terribly wrong that the kids are dropping out at the  
24 rate they are. Go to some of the high schools. I have  
25 a friend who's an assistant to the principal at one of

1 the high schools.

2 I went in one day to say hello to her, spent  
3 most of the time -- she spent most of the time with  
4 administrative problems, disciplinary problems, not  
5 doing anything to better the school atmosphere but  
6 dealing with administrative and problems of that  
7 nature, and this goes on and on and on, and it's  
8 something that it's a shame that it comes to the point  
9 where the government, the Federal Government, has to  
10 get involved and look at these issues because that's  
11 why we're paying people that are apparently educated  
12 and have been trained in the field of education to do  
13 the best job they can do, and yet it's not happening.

14 So, the stories that these folks are telling  
15 you probably because they're being polite in some ways  
16 are exactly on target. They're increasingly worse. I  
17 went to Central High School one night, and I was told  
18 by the director of maintenance for this system about  
19 the roof, and that, you know, it was going to be four  
20 years before we put the roof on, and water is coming  
21 through, and it's damaging rooms, and, so, it's going  
22 to be four years. That's just the way it is. It's  
23 four years.

24 I can understand our State Department of  
25 Transportation, sometimes it takes 10 years to do a

1 bridge, and that's outdoors. This is all indoors with  
2 a roof, and in most cases, it probably could have been  
3 corrected, but we were told no, it's going to take four  
4 years to do, and, so, no one applied for the roof  
5 repair with the state.

6 I had to take emergency measures in the  
7 legislature to get it through. We got it through, and  
8 wouldn't you know? They let the project drag out for  
9 three years. They had the reimbursement rate that they  
10 could do it, but just out of spite, to show  
11 Representative Caruso and some of the interested  
12 parents, we're going to let this thing drag out, and  
13 then when they started doing the repair work, it's when  
14 the students apparently are going to be in school, and  
15 then they have to reschedule it to do it at a certain  
16 time, and that got all messed up. Then we went over  
17 budget and everything else continues to go on the way  
18 we exist.

19 Then, if I could, we went to a parents'  
20 meeting, and we did have an associate superintendent of  
21 schools or I should say an assistant superintendent for  
22 the high schools was here. She was, I think, from  
23 Tucker, Wisconsin, and the woman knew what she was  
24 talking about.

25 I'm going to tell you why. I got up at every

1 education -- every meeting of the parents, and I  
2 complained about the system, and all the people who  
3 were in the administration of the school board sat  
4 there and just nodded their heads.

5 This woman got up and started arguing with  
6 me. I could tell this woman really cared what was  
7 going on. She said, "I know about education. I was  
8 trained, and let me give you the answer." I had a lot  
9 of respect for this woman, but wouldn't you know she  
10 left because of the nonsense and the politics and  
11 everything else. She took off. Unfortunately, she  
12 didn't reapply. She just took off.

13 So, you see, then when we weren't  
14 questioning, they had eight computers in the high  
15 school, none of them were hooked up, and I said to  
16 them, "Why aren't we hooking them up?" They said, "we  
17 only have two people that does hook-up for the whole  
18 school." No one cared about coming in, setting them  
19 up, turning them on.

20 So, these computers sat there. The students  
21 couldn't avail themselves of them. No one could take  
22 any involvement in it, and this is what goes on, and  
23 again I really believe it's because of the make-up of  
24 the school system, and because of the high levels of  
25 low-income or poverty, and that gives reason for



1 unfortunately some to take advantage of that and to  
2 exploit that.

3           Again, if there were people maybe of middle-  
4 income or higher from some of the suburban communities,  
5 those administrators would be out in a minute, I can  
6 assure you of that because it's done all the time, and  
7 yet in this school system, it's allowed to exist, and  
8 that type of problem exists.

9           You hear some of these stories tonight. A  
10 lot of these problems should have been resolved frankly  
11 within the system. Shouldn't have to wait till a  
12 federal hearing or an advisory hearing on this for  
13 people to come out and start telling you this stuff.  
14 Shouldn't this all be kind of addressed and worked  
15 through already? This should all be to me very basic  
16 administrative things that take place.

17           MR. MACY: Mr. Caruso, were you in the state  
18 legislature when the complaints not dissimilar to this  
19 arose in Hartford that led to the state take over of  
20 the --

21           AUDIENCE: Yes.

22           MR. MACY: -- school system?

23           AUDIENCE: And as a matter of fact, Mr. Macy,  
24 it was one of the hardest votes I had to make, and I  
25 voted to allow the state to take over the school system

1 in Hartford.

2 MR. MACY: Well, --

3 AUDIENCE: I also said, if I could, because I  
4 think this is important, I also told the superintendent  
5 of schools at one of the meetings that if I didn't see  
6 some action in the school system corrected, that I  
7 would propose in Hartford similar action for  
8 Bridgeport, that the state --

9 MR. MACY: That was my next question.

10 AUDIENCE: That's right. That the state come  
11 in and take over the Bridgeport school system. That's  
12 a hard thing to say because I think we have a lot of  
13 good teachers, and I don't want to stand up here and  
14 condemn every teacher or every administrator.

15 I think we have a lot of good people within  
16 the system, and I know that because I deal with them,  
17 but I think a lot of the good people, unfortunately,  
18 are held down or held back because they're in a system  
19 that retards or holds down progress or growth or  
20 development.

21 It doesn't encourage any of that. It never  
22 has, and as a result of that, it's just made the  
23 situation progressively, progressively worse, and it's  
24 unfortunate that we had to, you know, take steps in  
25 that.

1 I've been involved in Democratic primaries,  
2 I'll be very frank here, to try to remove the last  
3 school board. I was active. I was a campaign manager,  
4 I'll tell you right now. No charge. I didn't charge  
5 my services at all.

6 There's been some people who have come before  
7 you tonight that have been campaign managers that  
8 charged. I didn't charge, and the reason I didn't  
9 charge was because I believe firmly that this system  
10 needed to be overhauled. We need to change. We needed  
11 a new approach, and we needed parents on the school  
12 board that had an interest in the system, and again I  
13 don't mean to attach everyone on the school board.

14 There's some good people, but there's a need  
15 to make that change, and, unfortunately, if it has to  
16 come in from federal oversight or some federal  
17 intervention, then there's a real need to do that.

18 MR. MACY: Would you give us your statement  
19 in writing, if you have a chance?

20 AUDIENCE: Yes, sir.

21 MR. MACY: By the end of June?

22 AUDIENCE: I will try to do that.

23 MR. MACY: Okay. Thank you.

24 AUDIENCE: If there's another question, I'd  
25 be happy to answer it.

1                   MR. MACY: Anybody here at the panel have any  
2 questions? Do you have a question to ask him before he  
3 sits down?

4                   DR. CHUN: Too many questions, but I guess i  
5 have to choose one. I heard you say there are some  
6 nights you can't sleep because the stories you heard  
7 from a client just reverberate themselves, and I have a  
8 sinking feeling that's going to happen to me tonight  
9 because all of these stories are too difficult and too  
10 hard to believe. I mean, it's just too much. I mean,  
11 year 2000.

12                   So, I am sure, as my colleagues are,  
13 wondering what is it? There are some obvious remedies,  
14 but you've thought about that. But let me just stay  
15 away from those obvious.

16                   I'm just wondering, in your assessment, is  
17 the replacement of the new superintendent coming in, I  
18 don't know this person, but is it going to really  
19 resolve or improve the situation?

20                   I have the feeling it's much more serious  
21 than that.

22                   AUDIENCE: But there's deeper problems.

23                   DR. CHUN: Right.

24                   AUDIENCE: But I think the first step is  
25 getting a superintendent, okay, that's going to be

1 independent, if you will, from the current political  
2 structure. Who that is, I don't know who they're going  
3 to select.

4 My hope is it's someone that's not connected  
5 or that it's someone that's part of the existing system  
6 because part of the problem is that that individual  
7 cannot really make change or effect change unless  
8 they're outside of it. They almost have to be  
9 objective to look at the broader picture of what the  
10 problem is and then try to change.

11 My concern is this, though. Whoever becomes  
12 the superintendent, and this is where it's going to be  
13 very important, the vigilance of parents and students  
14 and people that are concerned, that when that  
15 superintendent tries to make change or effects change  
16 in a positive way, that the current system doesn't  
17 reach up and pull that person down, and that's the  
18 concern.

19 The other concern is that it doesn't become  
20 window dressing, that you see the superintendent trying  
21 to make the changes but is being held back to really  
22 getting into the layers of the bureaucracy that's  
23 destroying the system.

24 You know, let me give you one example, and  
25 then I'll allow you to ask another question here. Two

1 people. There was a big thing in the city that we  
2 needed teachers. We were short teachers, and people  
3 wrote to me or called me, constituents, and said, you  
4 know, "Chris, I'm interested in being a teacher, could  
5 you help us out?" I said, "I will pass your name on to  
6 the system", and in some cases, I'd even get the  
7 application, give it to them, say fill it out and get  
8 it back down to the personnel office.

9 On two occasions, I did that. Right? Then I  
10 call up the superintendent, and I'd say there's two  
11 people wanting to go for an interview, all I ask is you  
12 give them an interview, and you make your choice on who  
13 those people are based on their qualifications.

14 On two occasions, neither one of those people  
15 were even given an interview, and they went to another  
16 system, and, you see, this is the problem that  
17 continuously goes on.

18 Now, as an elected official, I'm held  
19 accountable all the time at election time, but yet with  
20 paid people, and here's the former superintendent, we  
21 never even evaluated the man.

22 No disrespect to Jim. Jim's a personal  
23 friend. I happen to like Jim Connelly very much. We  
24 never evaluated his service in the time that he was  
25 superintendent. Yet every three years, we would do an

1 increase in his salary, but we never evaluated to see  
2 exactly what the system was performing.

3 DR. CHUN: Your response, and I appreciate  
4 your candor, raises another question, and that is, what  
5 do you think has allowed that situation to continue?  
6 That is, was it school board supporting him or was it  
7 the mayor or whoever in the power structure, and what  
8 is it that allowed that sort of intolerable situation  
9 to continue?

10 AUDIENCE: Well, I think it's probably three-  
11 or four-fold. Okay. One of the major things is that  
12 the way the system currently is set up, is that the  
13 Board of Education members in many ways are chosen by  
14 the Democratic Party or Republican Party, and they're  
15 usually answerable to who's in authority.

16 In this case, in many cases, the mayor has  
17 had the direct involvement of some of those board  
18 members. The majority votes, if you will, on the Board  
19 of Education. So, if you had one or two people that  
20 wanted to make change on that system, they couldn't  
21 make that because the majority would constantly have  
22 the power, and they would exercise their votes  
23 accordingly.

24 That's why over the past year, you had such  
25 an outcry in the city, and you had an election, and let

1 me just give you an example of this.

2           There were three candidates that ran last  
3 time out. They won on the voting machines, majority  
4 vote, and they lost in the absentee ballots. Okay?  
5 So, you know, in the political system, and it is very  
6 notorious in cities, and political systems, what ends  
7 up happening is that the political system actually  
8 strangles education because again it sees it as an  
9 opportunity to reach in for patronage and other  
10 services, and it strangles professional people, such as  
11 the educators and so forth.

12           So, that's part of the problem. It's all  
13 kind of interwoven in the system, and that exists  
14 tremendously. That's why again if anyone doesn't  
15 believe these problems exist, then they're really blind  
16 to the problems.

17           If anything, this panel could be helpful in  
18 maybe underscoring or highlighting problems so when a  
19 new superintendent comes on, they have ammunition, if  
20 you will, to use that when they're going to try to  
21 effect change in the system.

22           DR. CHUN: Highlighting what, I wonder?

23           AUDIENCE: I think highlighting some of the  
24 abuses that have been talked about tonight, and, of  
25 course, they should be substantiated in some cases. I



1 understand that. But, you know, highlighting some of  
2 those concerns, and, you see, some people argue that  
3 it's not good to highlight those problems because it  
4 demeans our system.

5 I don't happen to be a person that agrees  
6 with that. I believe that sometimes allowing light to  
7 shine on a problem sometimes corrects the problem, and,  
8 so, I think if we can do it in a constructive way, then  
9 I think we should do it. I think we should say here  
10 are the problems, here's what's been identified, and  
11 here's what we need to do to make the change.

12 But unless we as people that care about  
13 education support whoever this new superintendent is,  
14 so that person can be independent and objective, then  
15 we'll be back to the same problems that we have.

16 Don't forget, you have a system, whoever's  
17 the superintendent coming in, it's been layered with  
18 people, you know. You have some positions that are  
19 created that I -- to this day -- let me give you  
20 another example because this is going to come up.

21 There's a regional soccer tournament for  
22 Bridgeport. Bridgeport's playing against Guilford and  
23 Cheshire, and I get a call about having that regional  
24 soccer tournament in Bridgeport, and usually we have  
25 Kennedy Stadium, but it's being renovated. So, they

1 can't use Kennedy Stadium.

2 Seaside Park is always booked with the  
3 soccer. So, it's hard to get a spot. So, where's the  
4 next available spot? Hedges Stadium. The city a  
5 couple of years back with state money spent tons of  
6 money refurbishing the stadium, state of the art. It's  
7 a beautiful facility.

8 The athletic director tells the person from  
9 the -- involved in the soccer event, we can't help you,  
10 go to one of the suburbs, and you know what the  
11 argument -- this is a soccer tournament for three hours  
12 from about 6 to 9 on May 31st, and the response was,  
13 "Well, the kids are going to be practicing for  
14 football."

15 Now, for three hours, where it's a regional  
16 event that could be so important to this city, to have  
17 talent such as Guilford and Cheshire to come in to our  
18 city, into a beautiful stadium, this is the response.

19 I had to call the president of the Board  
20 today to ask her to intervene so that we could have  
21 this soccer tournament. Now, I have a heck of a lot  
22 more things I can do as a legislator that I can't.

23 Every time I have to take 10-15 minutes to  
24 call the president of the school board to get something  
25 done like this that I consider just nonsense, it's

1 taking away from my time to try to help do other things  
2 for the city.

3 See, these are just part of the overall  
4 problem you have, and again it's a lack of -- it's been  
5 allowed to exist for too long. Everyone's been allowed  
6 to just be free spirits in the system, and that's been  
7 the problem, and it gets progressively worse.

8 MR. MACY: Thank you very much, Mr. Caruso.

9 AUDIENCE: Yes. Thank you.

10 (Applause)

11 MR. MACY: Why don't you first see if there  
12 are any other people who haven't spoken yet that wish  
13 to speak? Are there any other people? Yes?

14 AUDIENCE: But I'll wait until later.

15 MR. MACY: Okay.

16 AUDIENCE: Excuse me. I have a head cold.

17 MR. MACY: Would you just give us your name  
18 for the record?

19 AUDIENCE: My name is Edward Fontinez. Me  
20 and my family moved here to Connecticut from New York  
21 November 15th. Me and my wife, Yolanda Fontinez,  
22 placed our son in the public school according to the  
23 zone which pertains to where one lives.

24 We placed him in Cross. Our son is a special  
25 ed. student. We told the staff of Cross about our

1 son's situation. Our son's IEP was soon to expire, and  
2 we wanted an extension. They told us they could not  
3 extend it because we needed to have him re-evaluated.

4 As a result, he was placed in a class with 32  
5 students and one teacher. What occurred after this was  
6 terrible on my son. From Day 1, my son was bullied.  
7 He had a chair pulled out from under him, and that's  
8 just the first incident. The second incident, a child  
9 threatened to shoot my son with his uncle's gun.

10 He was kicked in his face by another child.  
11 That was, by the way, the third incident. After  
12 keeping him out of school two weeks, they called us  
13 back to put him back in school, after assuring us that  
14 our child would be safe.

15 My son gets on the bus. He goes to school as  
16 he usually does. He gets off the bus, sees other  
17 children throwing snowballs. He decides to do the same  
18 thing. A piece of that snowball hits a young girl on  
19 the face, and she proceeds to begin stomping on my  
20 son's face. He was badly bruised. He had lumps on  
21 him. We had to rush him to the hospital.

22 The situation called for me to press charges  
23 against the young girl. I don't blame the child  
24 because the situation was not the child's fault when it  
25 was that there was no supervision when this child got

1 off the bus to get into school.

2 MR. MACY: There was no paraprofessional or  
3 anyone else on the bus that --

4 AUDIENCE: Nobody.

5 MR. MACY: -- was responsible for the  
6 children?

7 AUDIENCE: Nobody. We took our son to the  
8 hospital. He was complaining about headaches and  
9 dizziness. He even blacked out in the bathroom while  
10 urinating. I had to take him back to the doctor's.

11 Then we had a PPT and took our son out of  
12 Cross. He was then placed in Benjamin Franklin. See,  
13 this is not the end of it. It just goes on. It goes  
14 on. We finally thought our troubles were over, but  
15 more problems arose in the following days at Benjamin  
16 Franklin.

17 A child tried to cut my son's hair with  
18 scissors. How he got the scissors was beyond me. He  
19 was also -- the same child also tried to strangle him  
20 with a cord out of a mouse from a computer.

21 Then the final incident was when they left my  
22 son at the swimming pool that she had sent him. I  
23 mean, how hard is it? You come into a swimming pool  
24 with 12 kids, you come out, you count 12, ah, 11, got  
25 to go back and find the missing one. They left my son

1 there.

2 My son walked from the center two blocks with  
3 traffic moving in and out of like warehouse driveways  
4 that were very active. He crossed a drawbridge. He's  
5 a 10-year-old boy. He crossed a drawbridge by himself.  
6 He walked all the way back these two very long blocks  
7 by himself to the school. He tried to find if anybody  
8 was in the offices. He wanted to try to use the phone,  
9 but he had no change, but he made it to the school. I  
10 thank God for that. He made it there safely.

11 MR. MACY: Was this reported to the  
12 principal?

13 AUDIENCE: It was. It was reported, and we  
14 do have an incident report on it. We just want our son  
15 out of Benjamin Franklin, and we don't feel confident  
16 with the schools in Bridgeport. We don't. I don't  
17 want him in these schools. I think I've said enough.

18 MR. MACY: Do you have any questions?

19 MS. JOHNSON: If I might add, Benjamin  
20 Franklin is an alternative school for children who get  
21 in trouble with the law.

22 AUDIENCE: My son's not a criminal.

23 MR. MACY: Are those the only children that  
24 are at that school?

25 MS. JOHNSON: No. That's -- predominantly,

1 that's where they're sent.

2 AUDIENCE: My son was -- he's a special ed.  
3 for speech impediment. They had him in the class in  
4 the school where he doesn't belong, obviously doesn't  
5 belong.

6 Another thing is I thank you for that  
7 comment, is that my son right now, he's learning off of  
8 these kids to do the things that he's not supposed to  
9 do. He's cursing at the teachers. He's giving them  
10 the middle finger, and that's not what I brought him to  
11 school to learn. I brought him to school to learn  
12 arithmetic, math, not to give people the middle finger.  
13 He's doing things like stealing from another.

14 I found him with a toy, and I asked him where  
15 did he get this, and he got it from another person's  
16 house. He never was like this. He was the kind of  
17 child that was raised in church.

18 Every time I went to church, he was there  
19 with me. I used to sing for a choir. I was the  
20 worship leader. He was always with me. He never was  
21 like that. He wouldn't even dare curse. Now, I find  
22 him even cursing around me sometimes, and I have to  
23 straighten him out. I just don't trust your schools no  
24 more.

25 MR. MACY: Anybody else? Ki-Taek, did you

1 have something you wanted to say?

2 DR. CHUN: Well, yes. Could you leave your  
3 phone number and name with us before you leave?

4 Maybe it may be time for us to ask Mr. Shamas  
5 if he could respond to some of these experiences that  
6 parents have reported, particularly in starting from  
7 this instance.

8 MR. SHAMAS: This one I'm not too familiar  
9 with, but I think -- is this the one that's under  
10 investigation right now?

11 AUDIENCE: It has been.

12 MR. SHAMAS: Yes, I think there's an  
13 investigation on-going.

14 DR. CHUN: Fine. I guess, so, let's just  
15 talk in hypothetical sort of terms.

16 In a well-run school system, when a school  
17 official does what he's alleged to have been done, what  
18 will be the process or recourse or what would be done  
19 if we had, say, --

20 MR. SHAMAS: A situation like this?

21 DR. CHUN: Yes.

22 MR. SHAMAS: Well, immediately, we would  
23 conduct an investigation. The -- pending the outcome  
24 of the investigation, that staff member, whoever it may  
25 be, would be subject to disciplinary action, including



1 anything from suspension up to getting a fair dismissal  
2 hearing.

3 DR. CHUN: Fine. In a fairly-run school  
4 system, how long might an investigation take place, if  
5 you're the superintendent with free hands? How long  
6 will --

7 MR. SHAMAS: They take place immediately. I  
8 mean, they're not --

9 DR. CHUN: Yes.

10 MR. SHAMAS: They're not dragged out. It's  
11 not dragged out. It's done immediately.

12 DR. CHUN: All right. And I'm just asking  
13 this for the record in a way.

14 Also, the son of the alleged inappropriate  
15 behavior by a teacher against this young school boy, I  
16 heard that the teacher was transferred -- a janitor was  
17 transferred.

18 Is that an appropriate action, do you think?

19 MR. SHAMAS: No, I don't believe that that's  
20 what happened.

21 DR. CHUN: Oh, you don't? I see.

22 MR. SHAMAS: To my knowledge, he's gone.  
23 He's out.

24 MR. MACY: He was terminated?

25 MR. SHAMAS: Well, he will be. He's out of

1 there now. He's on the -- we have an investigation.

2 DR. CHUN: Okay. That's all right.

3 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: Could I just piggyback  
4 on your question? In a well-organized and administered  
5 school system, in that particular school, would  
6 counseling -- I'm going to also, you know, bring back  
7 the Patrick Johnson hitch here.

8 Would counseling have been administered to  
9 those victims? Was it?

10 MR. SHAMAS: I don't know. I don't know.  
11 I'm not familiar. I don't know what happened as a  
12 result. I know that the investigation is going on,  
13 both by DCF and by Board of Ed. staff, but I don't  
14 know.

15 I heard the parents say that the counseling  
16 had not taken place.

17 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: That's what I heard,  
18 also.

19 MR. SHAMAS: Yes.

20 MR. MACY: If you will talk to Dr. Mendelez  
21 --

22 MR. SHAMAS: I have notes on that issue. I  
23 have notes on that issue.

24 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: And, so, if it has  
25 not, could you make a statement of why it was not

1 proposed or --

2 MR. SHAMAS: I can't respond.

3 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: I know, but, I mean,

4 --

5 MS. JOHNSON: With all due respect, I spoke,  
6 and I'm in contact with one of the parents as of  
7 yesterday. The only thing the parent was told, this  
8 one particular parent, the only thing she was told was  
9 it's being taken care of. She was also told that the  
10 gentleman was transferred, and that he's currently  
11 working in the nutrition system, so that he's away from  
12 children. He was not terminated, and she's only heard,  
13 other than being told by the assistant principal what  
14 had happened to her daughter, she's only heard from the  
15 DCF social worker one time, who asked permission to  
16 interview her child.

17 The police have not yet been contacted. We  
18 contacted the police this morning. Well, DCF contacted  
19 the police, but no one has been out to interview these  
20 children. There's a whole procedure that's laid out by  
21 state law.

22 You have to -- there's mandated reports that  
23 have to go through certain steps. These steps have not  
24 been carried out, and if anything has been done, the  
25 parents have not been given the courtesy of having an

1 explanation of what's going on.

2 If my daughter went to school and someone  
3 molested my child in the manner that these children had  
4 been assaulted, I would have demanded to know where the  
5 person, the perpetrator was. I would have demanded to  
6 know that police action was taken on the same day.

7 The Board of Education has its own police  
8 division. That man should have been escorted off the  
9 grounds in handcuffs by a Board of Education police  
10 officer, and he should have been turned over to the  
11 city, and what the explanations that have been given to  
12 these parents is not sufficient, and there has been no  
13 counseling provided to these parents.

14 MR. SHAMAS: The report that I was given, I  
15 was told that the three parents were talked to by the  
16 school administration, and in fact, the parents  
17 complimented the school administration with the swift  
18 action that was taken.

19 MS. MCKENZIE-WHARTON: We had one parent that  
20 actually shared that that was not the case. She was  
21 not happy. She stood right there at the mike.

22 MR. SHAMAS: All right.

23 MS. JOHNSON: I didn't hear any compliments  
24 from any of these three mothers that spoke earlier.

25 MR. MACY: See, that's fundamentally why we

1 wanted Dr. Mendelez and Mr. Kelly here, because these  
2 are very serious things that you are not aware of  
3 because you've only been back here for -- since March,  
4 and we really look forward to seeing some kind of  
5 explanations, especially in these three cases of these  
6 children, given to us so that -- and to the proper  
7 authorities for probably criminal action. It's just  
8 wrong.

9 Are there any other parents -- yes? Go  
10 ahead, Danielle.

11 MS. ROBLES: Everything you've heard tonight  
12 is by no means unknown to our Board of Education, and  
13 as I've been sitting here, I've been watching your  
14 reactions, and I really have been appreciating it  
15 because it's so completely different from what we get,  
16 and I mean no disrespect at all to Mr. Shamas tonight,  
17 but the types of reactions that we get or the types of  
18 answers that we've been hearing from Mr. Shamas tonight  
19 really conflict with actual parents or you get, well,  
20 what I call -- it's very disrespectful, but I call it  
21 the "dumb stare", and we get that from our Board of  
22 Education members and our staff.

23 Parents get up there, and they give these  
24 emotional stories where children have been mistreated  
25 or abused, parents have been, you know, spoken to

1 rudely, and they sit there.

2 As a student member of the state board, I've  
3 come to learn that that's not the way things are. I  
4 was the student rep to the local board the year before  
5 I got on the state board, and I witnessed the dumb  
6 stare, where they just didn't respond, didn't ask  
7 questions, nothing. It was basically okay, you said  
8 it, next business.

9 On the state board, it's completely  
10 different, and I'm glad to see that here it is, too,  
11 but I think it's important for you to know that the  
12 people who are supposed to be answering to us don't do  
13 it, and the reactions that they give to us are  
14 basically that they just don't care.

15 MR. MACY: What has the state board said to  
16 you? As a member of the state board, obviously student  
17 members of state boards, have you brought these  
18 complaints to the state board?

19 MS. ROBLES: No.

20 MR. MACY: Oh, you haven't?

21 MS. ROBLES: The state board deals with  
22 things differently. What is being voiced tonight are  
23 local concerns.

24 Now, for the state to become involved, it  
25 would be more something on a Hartford level, where

1 they, you know, -- I won't say Hartford level, but  
2 where they would come and take over. Until that is  
3 raised, I don't -- I mean, I can't speak for the state.

4 MR. MACY: Right.

5 MS. ROBLES: But from my perspective, I can't  
6 see the state becoming involved in these types of  
7 issues, unless it's to where it's going to take it over  
8 as Mr. Caruso said.

9 DR. CHUN: There is always a trigger point,  
10 though. There is no legal clearly-defined trigger  
11 point which --

12 MS. ROBLES: No, there isn't.

13 DR. CHUN: -- says beyond this, it becomes a  
14 state matter until there's a -- so, it seems there is  
15 room for a school board member, whether state board of  
16 education member, the person is student or regular  
17 member, this seems to be a legitimate concern for those  
18 issues to be brought to the attention of the state  
19 board of education, and what I'm hearing is it's not  
20 being done.

21 MR. MACY: There is a venue. What -- the  
22 complaints should be given to State Commissioner Ted  
23 Serge, and he has the authority in his office to  
24 investigate -- well, obviously it hasn't been done.

25 DR. CHUN: Why?

1 MR. MACY: I don't know.

2 MS. JOHNSON: You need a written complaint.

3 MS. ROBLES: Exactly. It would be up to the  
4 parents, community members, local board members, staff  
5 members in the city. If they don't take it to that  
6 level, then they're not going to know about it. It's  
7 up to the local community here to take it to the next  
8 level.

9 MR. MACY: Well, you know what you have to  
10 do. Those people in the local community groups.

11 DR. CHUN: But then, let's simplify it,  
12 though. It has been going on for too long, and yet  
13 action has not been taken. So, I think there must be  
14 good reason.

15 MR. MACY: But I'm saying that if it's not  
16 brought --

17 DR. CHUN: It sounds, you know, like Kim is  
18 there. Why hasn't it been taken, that action?

19 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I mean, I think because the  
20 people who are in power control the money and  
21 everything.

22 DR. CHUN: No. The state board of education.  
23 I think that's the issue we're at now.

24 MR. MACY: The state commissioner of  
25 education.



1 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I don't know the answer to  
2 that.

3 MR. MACY: There's a gentleman back there.  
4 That's Mr. Mintz, right?

5 AUDIENCE: George Mintz. What I'm saying is  
6 not really about the complaints, but it's about the  
7 process, and I think it's important that you, the  
8 Commission, understand the process in Bridgeport.

9 Mr. Macy, thank you for echoing my  
10 sentiments, that Bridgeport is a tale of two cities,  
11 and you really, really -- if you take nothing else away  
12 from here, take that away, because it really is, and  
13 such to the fact that Kim talked about all the  
14 incidents that exist within the city.

15 Unfortunately, too many people in the city,  
16 within the school system, see parents who bring  
17 problems to the table for resolution as troublemakers,  
18 not as people who want to resolve an issue, so that the  
19 livelihood of all of our students and within the city  
20 can be more enjoyable.

21 So, what you have, unlike a lot of cities,  
22 you don't have a unified school district where you have  
23 one big parent group that can come together and sit  
24 down and talk about issues and talk about how do we  
25 raise these issues and bring them to the forefront and

1 suggest what you're talking about, why didn't you as  
2 committee members, as groups, as PTSOs, come together  
3 and take these issues forward?

4 In Bridgeport, unfortunately, it's used, and  
5 I could be wrong, and if I am, Mr. Shamas, correct me,  
6 but in Bridgeport, you have a group of parents who fall  
7 under an umbrella called Title 1, and these are Title 1  
8 parents, and you have the other parent groups and PTSOs  
9 that are non-Title 1.

10 Well, never the two shall meet because the  
11 non-Title 1 parents operate on a different set of rules  
12 and regulations than the Title 1 parents. So, if non-  
13 Title 1 parents have issues like this that they want to  
14 bring forward, you're not going to get the support that  
15 you should get from, say, the Title 1 parent group.

16 So, I'm sure you're sitting there, and you're  
17 saying Bridgeport is a city of 20 some thousand  
18 students. You mean to tell me you can't find 50 or a  
19 hundred parents in this city who's willing to pick up  
20 the gauntlet and run with it to resolve some of these  
21 issues, and that is because while we talk about we do  
22 parent advocate training, but we're not training the  
23 parents under that parent advocate training to do some  
24 of the things that we really need to have parents learn  
25 in order to bring about change within the city.

1           I moved into Bridgeport out of another city,  
2           and I can tell you when parents come together, the  
3           power that parents bring to the table is not to make  
4           the school system look bad. It's to make the school  
5           system look good, because no parent wants to keep  
6           pointing out the negative parts of the school system  
7           because eventually the children will have no interest  
8           and will not feel proud of where they are.

9           What we want to do is to solve the problems  
10          so that everyone can feel good about him or herself and  
11          the school that our children attend. Until such time,  
12          and I think that whether it is something that the Board  
13          of Ed. need to look at or whether it's something that  
14          we as parents need to really look at, parents in this  
15          city must all come under the same umbrella, and until  
16          such time we do come under the same umbrella, you're  
17          going to have this disjointedness between the parents  
18          and how do parents really surface issues so that these  
19          issues can be brought about, and that change can really  
20          take place?

21          And I would like this Commission, if  
22          anything, to look into or perhaps in your report  
23          suggest some ways by which parents, true parent power,  
24          true parent power, can be done in such effect that all  
25          parents within a school district can be combined under

1 the same umbrella.

2 But I just wanted to point that out so that  
3 you would understand that it's not like we are not  
4 aware of some of the issues that these parents have,  
5 but in some cases, as parents and committee groups, our  
6 hands are tied.

7 MR. MACY: Yes? You wanted to make a  
8 statement?

9 MS. McLAUGHLIN: I just wanted to give you an  
10 example of -- from April 25th, 2000, there were 600, at  
11 least, I think there were probably more, the paper  
12 reported more, there were over 600 parents at a budget  
13 hearing about city budget, which the major part of the  
14 city budget is the Board of Education. It was on Page  
15 17 of the newspaper, I believe, and if it had been in  
16 Fairfield that this happened, the Fairfield parent  
17 meetings, where a hundred parents come, has been on the  
18 front page.

19 So, there's a black-out obviously that's a  
20 serious problem in getting the word out to other  
21 people. When we tried to flyer in front of one of the  
22 schools, we were led off the property by the Board of  
23 Education Security Police.

24 When one -- when a parent asked -- there was  
25 a change that happened last year, where the regional

1 school was not going to continue seventh and eighth  
2 grades. So, the sixth graders, there was a big  
3 decision that needed to be made by the Board of Ed.  
4 where those sixth graders go from this regional school.  
5 Do they go to the magnet schools or do they have to go  
6 back to their neighborhood schools, and a few of the  
7 parents went to the principal of a couple of schools,  
8 asked to have something distributed about the Board of  
9 Ed. meeting coming up. It was refused. No rights to  
10 have anything distributed.

11 There's a very -- we live in a town where  
12 about -- I believe, I could be wrong, but about 3,000  
13 jobs are city jobs with benefits. In this town, they  
14 are some of the best jobs that we have. This is not  
15 Stanford. This is not New Haven even, and I know New  
16 Haven has, you know, a poverty level of about the same  
17 as ours, but the jobs that have been created are part-  
18 time/no-benefit/low-wage jobs, in comparison to a  
19 \$25,000 job with the city with full benefits, is the  
20 cream of the crop.

21 And it's not only can you control people with  
22 those jobs, but you can offer them or take them away  
23 from family members in addition, so that the ability --  
24 I would bet that's probably the largest employer in the  
25 city.

1                   So, in fact, what we're doing is -- don't  
2 quote me on that. But -- okay. The hospital. But --  
3 well, the hospital's one of the largest employers but  
4 not necessarily of Bridgeport residents. That's what  
5 I'm saying. Bridgeport residents.

6                   So, what happens is, it's like living in a  
7 mill town. I grew up in Pennsylvania. Everything is  
8 controlled.

9                   MR. MACY: It's a company town.

10                  MS. McLAUGHLIN: It's a company town, but the  
11 company is the city. The city is a hundred percent  
12 controlled by the Democratic Party. All 20 city  
13 council members are Democrats. I actually went through  
14 here, five of them work for the Board of Ed. Five out  
15 of 20. Two of them work for the city. Two of them are  
16 related. They're on city pensions. That's nine votes  
17 out of 20 right there.

18                  So, you say gee, what's the problem? Mr.  
19 Shamas, I'd hate to put you on the spot, but you went  
20 into the interim superintendent job straight from being  
21 the staff person in charge of the staff of the mayor's  
22 staff.

23                  Parents did not want that to happen. When  
24 the superintendent was sick a year ago, the associate  
25 superintendent stepped in and served in that capacity,

1 but now that there's a huge outcry from parents,  
2 somebody -- I'm not going to -- but I feel like I --

3 MR. SHAMAS: No. I think you're  
4 misrepresenting.

5 MS. McLAUGHLIN: There's being questions  
6 asked here.

7 MR. SHAMAS: There's a lot of campaigning  
8 going on here tonight. I don't know if you realize  
9 that.

10 MR. MACY: We would -- if you wish to make a  
11 response, --

12 MR. SHAMAS: Well, only that there's a lot of  
13 accusations, and there's a lot of misrepresentations.  
14 The -- in my situation, the consultants that the Board  
15 of Education hired to find a permanent superintendent  
16 clearly indicated to the Board you don't put in -- you  
17 don't put a person on staff in as acting because then  
18 you're not going to get the pool of candidates out  
19 there. So, that was the thinking behind that.

20 It wasn't that they picked me because it was  
21 a slight at her. It was so that it would not move  
22 anyone's candidacy from on staff from applying.

23 AUDIENCE: And I think that needs to be -- I  
24 don't think it's a slight at any one.

25 MR. SHAMAS: But that's what happened.

1           AUDIENCE: Right. But in other towns, in  
2 other parts of the state, for example, in towns most  
3 close to us, the superintendent was -- left, they  
4 brought someone in from out of --

5           MR. SHAMAS: That's clearly an option the  
6 Board had.

7           AUDIENCE: But I just want to keep it in the  
8 parameter that -- and also, it should be noted that the  
9 mayor criticized the consultant firm that has come in  
10 on the radio publicly. He's done that. So, you know,  
11 I think -- and if I could express something to this  
12 panel that I haven't, and maybe I didn't do a good  
13 enough job on it, we're a city of about a 143,000  
14 people.

15           But if you all remember the days of Mayberry  
16 R.F.D. with Andy Griffith and all, that's exactly what  
17 Bridgeport is. It's like the Mayberry R.F.D. And  
18 everything is interconnected. So, when you remove one  
19 part of it, something else falls in, and as Kim has  
20 mentioned eloquently, exactly the facts of what you  
21 have, is exactly what it is.

22           So, now when you say, well, should the  
23 parents bring the complaints to the state school board,  
24 the reality of it is when you look at Bridgeport in  
25 comparison with other districts, such as Hartford and



1 New Haven, and traditionally the state does that, look  
2 at the worst-performing school districts, and you try  
3 to compare them and see Bridgeport's doing a little bit  
4 better than New Haven, a little bit better than  
5 Hartford and so forth, which is a terrible thing to do,  
6 and why are we comparing it to communities around us  
7 when you think about it?

8 George Mintz and I have had many  
9 conversations about this, why are we comparing it with  
10 other higher-performing districts? Why are we  
11 encouraged to rise up to the level of better-performing  
12 school districts?

13 So, when the state looks at it as a  
14 complaint, they're looking and saying, well, all these  
15 problems that have been discussed tonight are isolated  
16 issues that should be handled administratively by that  
17 school board and the superintendent.

18 When you look at the Hartford incident, and  
19 why did the state take it over, they had one high  
20 school that was going not to be reaccredited. You had  
21 a series of other problems, and, so, the problem looked  
22 even worse, and they had to step in.

23 We've had a superintendent of schools that  
24 has boasted of the fact that we've had one or two  
25 increases in the test scores, yet 70 percent of our

1 school kids are failing the minimum test scores.

2 So, when you start doing that, and you start  
3 looking at this, even if the parents did bring a  
4 complaint to the state school board, it wouldn't have  
5 been acted upon, I don't think, in a way of really  
6 making changes. They would have said, you know, based  
7 on Bridgeport compared to Hartford and New Haven, the  
8 test scores are a little higher. Things that are  
9 judged that way are a little bit better, and all the  
10 isolated incidents that we talk about here, the little  
11 situations in the schools, any educator would say,  
12 well, that's something that should be handled  
13 administratively through that local school board. So,  
14 it wouldn't have the same weight or the same power.

15 Now, the other factor, and I'll conclude, is  
16 that the former superintendent of schools was involved  
17 in the political system. He was 18 years as a  
18 superintendent, and I'm not saying he did everything  
19 terrible. I don't think that's fair. You know, every  
20 superintendent does some good things, and as you go  
21 through it, he did do some good stuff for the school  
22 system.

23 The reality, he was an aide to a former mayor  
24 in Bridgeport. He was on the Democratic town  
25 committee. He was part of that system. So, in

1 fairness, how do you expect a person who's been  
2 indoctrinated in that system to step out of that system  
3 and do something? It is difficult to do that. That's  
4 the problem that you have, and I think, you know,  
5 again, when we talk about civil rights, that's a  
6 violation of civil rights because taxpayer money is  
7 being used without accountability.

8 So, I think there is an issue there, and I  
9 think it is an issue because of the dominant population  
10 of that district happens to be low-income people where  
11 their civil rights are being violated. So, there are  
12 those comparisons, I think, to be drawn.

13 MR. MACY: Pat, you had a question?

14 MR. JOHNSON: I have two quick questions for  
15 Mr. Shamas, if I could, please.

16 You had mentioned earlier that there are a  
17 160 custodians or --

18 MR. SHAMAS: Approximately.

19 MR. JOHNSON: -- so in the school system, and  
20 one supervisor.

21 MR. SHAMAS: Had been.

22 MR. JOHNSON: Had been one supervisor.

23 MR. SHAMAS: Yes.

24 MR. JOHNSON: How -- it's a mystery to me how  
25 an administration could assume that with one supervisor

1 overseeing a 160 -- how would an annual evaluation be  
2 done of their performance?

3 MR. SHAMAS: That's --

4 MR. JOHNSON: It's a very simple question,  
5 but I -- and -- but your statement, I think, indicates  
6 the serious neglect within this system, --

7 MR. SHAMAS: It's a problem.

8 MR. JOHNSON: -- the absolute seriousness of  
9 the lack of oversight in the system, and another  
10 question to follow up.

11 We had heard statements earlier this  
12 afternoon that there are teachers within the system  
13 who've been described as "untouchable". In other  
14 words, because they are so well connected politically,  
15 and this gentleman, who's the state representative,  
16 alluded to patronage, they're so well connected  
17 politically, that principals and administrators can't  
18 discipline them. They can do whatever they want in the  
19 school, treat kids and parents however they want, but  
20 there can be -- but there's no accountability for these  
21 teachers.

22 Do you have any knowledge or insight of that?

23 MR. SHAMAS: No. Unless, you know, you give  
24 me a specific situation, I really don't.

25 MS. JOHNSON: I can give you a specific

1 situation for Mr. Shamas to respond to, although the  
2 situation arose before you were in place in the interim  
3 position.

4 The young man that spoke earlier, Calvin  
5 Ortiz, who had the broken finger. He was assaulted by  
6 the school teacher. His teacher was punished after  
7 there was an administrative investigation. DCF also  
8 conducted an investigation and substantiated that he  
9 had been assaulted by the teacher and verbally abused  
10 over a period of time.

11 This teacher was given three-weeks suspension  
12 with pay, which, as the young man stated, amounted to a  
13 vacation. This teacher, my understanding, was  
14 blanketed from any further -- and I'm not going to go  
15 into a whole lot of detail, but this is clearly a  
16 situation that Mr. Johnson is trying to address.

17 This teacher was blanketed from any serious  
18 discipline, and he became one of those untouchables.

19 MR. SHAMAS: Why?

20 MS. JOHNSON: He was --

21 MR. SHAMAS: But why? What are you saying?  
22 Who blanketed him, and why?

23 MR. MACY: Well, I don't know whether you  
24 want to say that publicly, but it's something that  
25 maybe we can find out --

1 MS. JOHNSON: It's in litigation. We will  
2 all find out in the end.

3 MR. MACY: Oh, it is in litigation now?

4 MS. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

5 MR. MACY: Okay. Then we definitely  
6 shouldn't go into it.

7 MS. JOHNSON: But these are the allegations  
8 that have been made. It's not the only situation.

9 MR. MACY: And we're going to have to wrap up  
10 soon. We're going to be back here at 9:00 tomorrow  
11 morning.

12 MS. McLAUGHLIN: If I could shed some light  
13 on the maintenance issue, I would suggest that you take  
14 a look at the budgets because what you will find is  
15 that in fact, the budget for last year -- I'm sorry --  
16 for this year, the budget -- the school year budget  
17 goes from July 1st to June 30th.

18 The big maintenance scandal erupted in  
19 September. So, what happened is all the money in the  
20 budget for maintenance was spent very quickly, and then  
21 all kinds of additional money had to be spent to make  
22 the public outcry go away. So, there was a lot of  
23 overtime. Parks and Recs employees were used. So, it  
24 wasn't -- you won't even see all of the money that was  
25 used.

1           If you take a look at the money, take a look  
2           at the overtime money and above budget item money that  
3           was spent on maintenance and then you look at the  
4           budget for this year, there is not nearly enough money.  
5           The maintenance problem is about to come back. There  
6           is not nearly enough money allocated to maintain the  
7           buildings.

8           Now, in addition to that, I want to just tell  
9           you that the state has now allocated nearly \$7 million  
10          additional money to the school system for the 2000 to  
11          2001 budget. That's an educational cost-sharing  
12          formula, and I can give you some more -- actually, Mr.  
13          Caruso, Representative Caruso's the one who has the  
14          information, but our budget this year where we had 600  
15          people at, the budget ended up, and Mr. Shamas, correct  
16          me if I'm wrong, in the ball park, it's been increased  
17          from last year so 2000-2001 will be about 2.3, I think,  
18          million additional. I could be giving it a little  
19          additional money.

20          But 7 million of additional dollars is coming  
21          into the city for education. The budget is only  
22          increasing by 2.3 million. Where is the rest of the  
23          money? It's gone down. There's a sinkhole in the  
24          city, and it's patronage. It's the Democratic Party.

25          The largest amount of money in this city

1 for -- to pay contractors, to pay architects, to pay  
2 engineers, to pay supply companies for toilet paper,  
3 the biggest part of that budget is the educational  
4 budget, if you think about it.

5 MR. MACY: Carmen, you're going to have the  
6 next question, which is the last question. Okay. So,  
7 would you come up, please? Introduce yourself.

8 AUDIENCE: My name is Carmen Dixon, and I am  
9 also a parent. I had my hand up. I'm a parent of two  
10 Bridgeport students.

11 I am a Bridgeport resident. I went to  
12 Bridgeport schools, and when it was brought up that  
13 certain staff members can do no wrong because they're  
14 never disciplined, my son went to a Bridgeport school,  
15 both of them did, and I figured if it was good enough  
16 for me, it should be good enough for my children, and  
17 when my son was in fourth grade, I got a call from his  
18 principal to discuss appropriate behavior with him.

19 So, I did. Once he came home, I said, "Jose,  
20 what did you do?" He said, "Mom, you put some razzle-  
21 dazzle Rice Krispies treats in my lunch box, and I took  
22 them out, and I went", and I said, "No, that couldn't  
23 be it. Jose, did you jump up? Did you scream? Did  
24 you make a scene?" He said, "Mom, no. That's all I  
25 did."



1           Fourth grade in the cafeteria with about 400  
2 kids because I worked there during one summer. So, I  
3 know the capacity. So, I say, you know, I got to check  
4 this out. So, I went there the next morning to the  
5 principal, and I said, "Jose, show me in front of your  
6 principal what you said you did." He looked at me. He  
7 said, "Mommy, I saw the Rice Krispies treats, and I  
8 went like this." I said, "Jose, did you get up? Did  
9 you make a noise?" He said, "No", and I looked at the  
10 principal. She said, "No. That's exactly what he  
11 did."

12           For a nine-year old in a cafeteria with over  
13 400 children, that was insane. I work -- I'm a  
14 principal. I see what kids do in a cafeteria. They  
15 don't get up, and they don't scream, and they don't  
16 throw food. It's okay, you know.

17           MR. MACY: That's right.

18           AUDIENCE: I couldn't believe it, and then  
19 from then on, she targeted my son every day. I went to  
20 Mr. Kelly. I'm a principal. I live in Bridgeport. I  
21 know who to call. So, I went to Mr. Kelly, in charge  
22 of an elementary school but also my immediate  
23 supervisor, but I went as a parent, and he told me, "I  
24 won't help you." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "I  
25 will not help you." This is my son. I was ready to

1 kill someone.

2 How could you not help me with my nine-year-  
3 old son in fourth grade, who had Rice Krispies treats?  
4 I was ready to flip. I said, "Jose, just ignore her."  
5 For a week, every day, there was something. I called  
6 Channel 8 News. I called some board members, and then  
7 when the board members got involved, then I got a call  
8 from Mr. Kelly. "You called a board member?"

9 I couldn't sleep. My son in fourth grade  
10 targeted over shaking his head while he's sitting. So,  
11 I -- when I hear of parents going through things  
12 because of their children, I say, "I work for the  
13 Board. I'm a parent." They know that I know who to  
14 call, and I will do it, and yet they targeted my son?

15 So, I say someone who doesn't know what to  
16 do, they probably would have a party with their  
17 children, and this person, the next year, she was an  
18 associate or assistant principal in the school, she was  
19 promoted. She got her own big school, and, you know,  
20 that's a smack in the face. People should not get away  
21 with anything like that.

22 She wasn't called in. She never had to  
23 apologize, nothing. It was like it didn't matter. So,  
24 as a principal, when I hear -- and I live in  
25 Bridgeport, and the parents seem me at Shaw. They see

1 me all over town, and they know that I'm ad advocate  
2 for their children, and I do walk around in sweats and  
3 sneakers, so I can relate, and they say, "Ms. Dixon,  
4 such and such is happening, such and such is  
5 happening", and it hits me because they're all my kids,  
6 and I know that I went through a week of sleepless  
7 nights over my son.

8 A boy fell three students in line behind my  
9 son, and he was told get to the back of the line, and I  
10 raised my son to be a real gentleman. So, any time his  
11 name was called out in a disciplinary way, he would  
12 start crying, and then the rest of the kids would make  
13 fun of him. I did not appreciate that my son was  
14 humiliated, and I was told I would not get help.

15 So, when these parents don't get help, I say  
16 if they said that to me, how would they disrespect  
17 these parents who they feel are not -- don't know what  
18 to do or who to turn to?

19 MR. MACY: Thank you, Carmen.

20 AUDIENCE: Thank you.

21 MR. MACY: For those who are interested, our  
22 last session tomorrow is at 4:10, if I get the time  
23 right, at 4:10. It's going to be an open session, and  
24 anybody can come and speak on whatever issue they want  
25 at that last session.

1                   So, with that, we're going to bid you adieu  
2 and thank you very much for attending and our panel for  
3 attending, and we'll see some of you tomorrow.

4                   (Whereupon, the forum was adjourned, to  
5 reconvene tomorrow morning, Thursday, May 25th, 2000,  
6 at 9:00 a.m.)

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Official Reporter

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