

Bethlehem went to Harrisburg to Advocate for Children

To seek justice in the funding of public education

On February 26, some 130 people from the 14 counties of the Diocese of Bethlehem made their presence known to their legislators in Harrisburg during a Stand for Children day. They knocked on doors, they handed out stars, asking legislators to be a light for children, they prayed, they raised their voices in song and spread the message that they care about kids and that all children deserve to receive a quality education that is equitably funded and not dependent on their zip code.

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs. 31:8-9

Over the past 30 years, Pennsylvania has allowed its funding of public education to suggest that some children are worth more than other. We bishop of five Episcopal diocese invite you to consider reversing an escalating spiral of inequity.

As public education has increased in its reliance on local taxes, the Commonwealth's funding for our children's education has decreased from 55 to 35 percent. The practical result is an unforgiving gap – up to \$8,500 difference per child – in the amount wealthy and poor districts provide for public education. The gap suggests that we tolerate economic segregation, that a substandard education is adequate for the poor and near poor. Are some of our children worth \$8, 500 a year more than others? Should the quality of their education be determined by their zip code?

We challenge you to support a system of taxation that decreases reliance on local property or wage taxes and returns the state to at least a 50 percent partnership in the funding of our public schools. (An excerpt for *Seeking Justice in Funding Public Education* A Joint Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal bishops of Pennsylvania