



## **Who is Buying Our Education System? Charter School Super PACs in Connecticut**

December 19, 2018

A small group of corporate executives, wealthy individuals, and advocacy groups for the charter school industry have collaborated to reshape Connecticut's educational system by pumping more than a half million dollars into our elections in the last three years. The common thread among this group is their advocacy for charter schools -- publicly funded schools that are run by private boards, independent of the local school district. Most of these donors have been involved in the management of charter schools or charter school advocacy groups as board or staff members. Thus, the charter school industry is spending large sums of money to influence public policy to make more money for itself, shift control of public education to private hands, and drive wedges between parents in communities of color and teacher unions.

The political action committees (PACs) that have funneled this money to support local candidates are not funded by small contributions from concerned parents and educators who want to improve local educational opportunities. Rather, most of the small number of wealthy individual donors to these PACs have management ties to charter school advocacy groups or to the charter schools themselves. We are calling these political action committees charter school PACs.

As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010, corporations, unions, lobbying organizations, and wealthy individuals can spend unlimited amounts of money influencing elections, as long as this spending is not done in coordination with candidates. The Court also made clear that this unlimited money should be fully disclosed to the public, to provide "citizens with the information needed to hold corporations and elected officials accountable for their positions and supporters." In Connecticut this year, super PACs are the primary channel for these "independent expenditures" and though the super PACs disclose their donors, some donors to charter school PACs are advocacy corporations that do not disclose their funders (i.e., dark money groups). Super PACs cannot contribute directly to candidates.

Through [Connect the Dollars](#), our collaborative project to track independent expenditures in the state, [Common Cause in Connecticut](#) and the [Connecticut Citizen Action Group](#) have been tracking super PAC income and spending in Connecticut this year. Using campaign finance reports filed with the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) through November 15, **this analysis highlights income and spending by super PACs focused on charter schools in 2018. Since the intimate connections between the donors, advocacy groups and charter schools becomes even more apparent when reviewing super PACs over a longer period, we have also researched donors to all charter school super PACs from 2016 through the present.**

The wealthy donors who provide most of the income for charter school super PACs in Connecticut are funding an electoral megaphone that drowns out the voices of Connecticut parents, citizens, and candidates who are concerned about the future of our schools. This special interest money also undermines the goals of Connecticut's strong campaign finance laws, and damages public confidence in the integrity of our election system.

The shifting and vague names of these super PACs mask a thinly veiled shell game played by a small group of advocacy groups, wealthy donors, and charter school board members. Our report finds that **since 2016:**

- Six charter school super PACs in the state have received \$512,958 in donations, with most of it (58%) coming from out-of-state sources.
- Just 26 donors have contributed virtually all of the half million dollars that have gone to these super PACs. A mere 10 donors account for 91% of these donations.
- The largest contributor by far is Alice Walton, heir to the Walmart fortune, who has donated \$195,000 to local super PACs.
- Two-thirds of the individual donors have had a direct role in the management of charter school advocacy groups and/or the charter schools themselves, as current or former board members or staff of these organizations. In other words, wealthy individuals who privately manage the charter school industry are donating thousands of dollars to super PACs in an effort to gain favor with state legislative candidates and influence spending on education – privatizing public education with the ultimate goal of profiting from that change of focus.
- While charter school PACs and their donors have supported both Democratic and Republican candidates since 2016, they focused primarily on supporting Democratic candidates in 2018. One of them, Build CT, focused on currying favor among candidates in races that were not highly competitive, including districts of members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and the Senate majority leader, a Democrat.

- While not a charter school PAC, the Change Connecticut PAC has ties to the charter school industry. It may have been used to evade Connecticut's campaign finance disclosure rules by indirectly funneling \$250,000 from Brian Olson, a wealthy leader in the charter school industry to support Republican candidates in the state.

Several donors and officers of these PACs have clear ties to these local advocacy organizations and schools:

- **Families for Excellent Schools (FES)** was, until its closure this year, a 501(c)(3) charter school advocacy organization that focused on Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts. It spent [\\$74,000](#) on lobbying expenses in Connecticut during the 2017-2018 legislative session, according to Office of State Ethics filings. Its 501(c)(4) "social welfare" arm, Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy, had a much larger lobbying budget, spending \$367,000 in this period. FES Advocacy spent [nearly \\$20 million](#) trying to pass a 2016 referendum initiative to expand charter schools in Massachusetts, which lost by a margin of [24 percentage points](#), a [major setback](#) for FES. The group violated Massachusetts election law by failing to disclose its donors and was [fined \\$426,000](#), the largest campaign finance fine in state history. FES announced in February 2018 that [it would close](#) after it fired its executive director following an investigation of "inappropriate behavior toward a non-employee."
- **Achievement First** is a network of 36 charter schools in Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island. Several PAC donors are board members of Achievement First or its individual Connecticut schools.
- The **Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN)** is a charter school advocacy group that spent [\\$370,000](#) on lobbying expenses in Connecticut during the 2017-2018 legislative session. Three of the five founding [board members](#) of ConnCAN were also [board members](#) of Achievement First at that time.
- The **Northeast Charter Schools Network** is an advocacy organization that represents the charter school industry in Connecticut and New York. It spent [\\$97,000](#) on lobbying expenses in the state during the 2017-2018 session.

### 2018 Super PACs

There are three charter school PACs in Connecticut that have reported income and spending in 2018 and that have supported or opposed candidates this year -- **Build CT, Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, and Change Course CT**. Super PACs are notorious for hiding their real agendas behind vague and innocuous names, and most charter school PACs are no exception. Few voters would have any idea that the Build CT and Change

Course CT PACs are funded by the wealthiest woman in the world in her effort to rework the school system to shift control of public education to private boards.

### Build CT PAC

The Build CT PAC, created in 2017, was formed and operated by staff from charter school advocacy organizations.

- The chair and treasurer of the Build CT PAC is Claudia Phillips, a [Community Engagement Manager](#) with the Northeast Charter Schools Network and a [former organizer](#) at Families for Excellent Schools.
- Samaris Rose, who was a paid canvasser this year for Build CT, was also an [organizer](#) at Families for Excellent Schools.
- Antonio Felipe, the PAC's previous treasurer, is a former [Connecticut Advocacy Intern](#) for the Northeast Charter Schools Network.

The PAC's income totaled \$118,250 in 2018. Its major donor was **Alice Walton**, who contributed \$100,000. She is the daughter of Walmart founder Sam Walton and is ranked by Forbes as the [wealthiest woman](#) in the world, with assets of \$46 billion. Alice sits on the [board](#) of the [Walton Family Foundation](#), which is the largest donor in the country to state charter school advocacy groups, contributing [\\$144 million](#) to 27 organizations, according to the Associated Press. In 2016, it [announced a plan](#) to spend \$1 billion over the next five years to expand charter school and school choice programs.

Walton has financially supported pro-charter and school choice candidates and organizations [across the country](#), contributing more than [\\$17 million](#). Among her donations was [\\$750,000](#) to Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy in support of a pro-charter ballot measure. The Walton Family Foundation gave Families for Excellent Schools [more than \\$13 million](#) between 2014 and 2016.

Other 2018 donors to the Build CT PAC were:

- **Richard Ferguson** of Westport, retired, former [Executive Vice President](#) of Cox Radio, [chair of the board](#) of the Elm City College Preparatory charter school, \$4,750.
- **Michael D. Griffin** of Indian River Shores, FL and New Preston, CT, a "community activist" and [treasurer of the board](#) of the Amistad Academy charter school board, \$4,500.
- **Kenneth Bartels** of Greenwich, retired, \$4,000.
- **Anthony Roncalli** of New Canaan, [attorney](#) at Norton Rose Fulbright, \$1,000.
- **Christopher Kunhardt** of Weston, retired, [former executive](#) at J.P. Morgan, [chair of the board](#) of the Achievement First Bridgeport Academy charter school, \$1,000.

In 2018, our analysis indicates that the PAC spent \$97,826, with much of that going to direct mail, Facebook ads, canvassing (door knocking), and consulting fees from RSA Strategies in New York. (This includes paid and unpaid expenses.)

However, the Build CT PAC did not target competitive elections. Nearly all of the Democratic candidates it supported won by overwhelming margins in safe districts where there was little chance they would lose, and three were unopposed in the general election. All but two of the districts are classified by the Secretary of the State as "[party-dominant districts](#)" -- those in which registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by at least 20 percentage points. Rather than favoring candidates in tight races, the PAC's spending appears to be aimed at currying favor among urban, Black and Latino legislators who have direct oversight of funding and policy for charter schools.

- Of the 12 incumbents supported by Build CT PAC, eight are members of the General Assembly's Education and/or Appropriations Committees. An open seat candidate, Dennis Bradley, is a member of the Bridgeport Board of Education. Senator Bob Duff is the Senate Majority Leader.
- All of the candidates represent urban districts, which have been a major focus for charter school expansion by the industry.
- All but two are African-American or Latino candidates, and these communities have been a focus of organizing by charter school advocates, raising questions about why communities of color are being targeted by charter school PACs.

The PAC supported these Democratic state senate candidates with its spending, all of whom won their elections. The candidates' share of the vote is also listed below (in general election, unless otherwise noted).

- Dennis Bradley (D-Bridgeport), 55% in primary (PAC supported only during primary election)
- Bob Duff (D-Norwalk), 63%
- Doug McCrory (D-Hartford), unopposed
- Gary Winfield (D-New Haven), 76%

It supported these candidates for state representative, who also won their elections with an overwhelming share of the vote:

- Juan Candelaria (D-New Haven), 88%
- Julio Concepcion (D-Hartford), 79%
- Brandon McGee (D-Hartford), 74% in primary (PAC supported only during primary election)
- Patricia Billie Miller (D-Stamford), 83%
- Geraldo Reyes (D-Waterbury), 91%
- Robert Sanchez (D-New Britain), 98%

- Caroline Simmons (D-Stamford), unopposed
- Chris Soto (D-New London), unopposed
- Toni Walker (D-New Haven), 94%

In 2017, the PAC supported the Democratic mayors of Stamford and Norwalk, and Doug McCrory in his state senate special election. They also supported Liam Sweeney, a Democratic Town Councilor in West Hartford and a [former staff lobbyist](#) for ConnCAN.

### Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC

While Build CT focuses its support on Democratic candidates, Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC, created in 2017, supports Republicans. Despite the distinction, they are two sides of the same coin. Connections between the two PACs and Families for Excellent Schools are obvious:

- Jasedia "Jessy" Toro, the chair and treasurer of the Leaders PAC, is a former [organizer](#) with Families for Excellent Schools and a [board member](#) of the Bridge Academy charter school in Bridgeport.
- Claudia Phillips, chair and treasurer of the Build CT PAC and former FES organizer, was paid by the Leaders PAC for her field coordination services. Two paid canvassers for the Leaders PAC share the same address as Claudia Phillips.
- Both the Build CT and Leaders PACs used RSA Strategies LLC as a consultant for strategy, mailers, printing door hangers, administrative assistance, and phone banks.

The PAC's \$25,251 in 2018 income came from:

- **John Irwin** of Greenwich, Managing Director at Hillside Capital and Brookside International, \$5,150. Irwin is a [Board member](#) of ConnCAN.
- **Brian Olson** of Greenwich, Investor at Kokino LLC, \$4,900. Olson is a [board member](#) of ConnCAN and of [Civic Builders](#), a nonprofit that supports charter school financing, design, and construction.
- **Jill Olson** of Greenwich, wife of Brian Olson, \$4,900.
- **Kenneth Bartels** of Greenwich, retired, \$4,000.
- **Richard Ferguson** of Westport, retired, former [Executive Vice President](#) of Cox Radio, \$3,800. Ferguson is [chair of the board](#) of the Elm City College Preparatory charter school.
- **Christopher Kunhardt** of Weston, retired, [former executive](#) at J.P. Morgan \$1,000. He is [chair of the board](#) of the Achievement First Bridgeport Academy charter school.
- **Peter Orthwein** of Greenwich, Executive Chairman of Thor Industries, Inc., a recreational vehicle manufacturer, \$1,000.

- **William Heins** of New Canaan, retired, \$500. Heins is a [former board member](#) of ConnCAN.

In 2018, the PAC spent \$25,415, with much of it spent on consultants, direct mail, canvassing (door knocking), and printing. The PAC targeted its support solely on Pam Staneski, a Republican candidate for state senate from Milford who currently serves as a state representative on the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee. The PAC supported Staneski during her Republican primary race, which she won with 65% of the vote. The spending in her district could have had a significant impact, since she received only \$39,410 in Citizens Election Program funding prior to the primary. Staneski lost in the general election to James Maroney, a Democratic candidate supported by *another* charter school Super PAC. (See the profile of Change Course CT PAC below.)

In 2017, the Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC supported Republican candidates for the Groton Town Council and Bridgeport Board of Education.

### **Change Course CT IE PAC**

Established in 2016, the Change Course CT PAC has close ties to [Democrats for Education Reform](#), a PAC formed by [hedge fund executives](#) that advocates for charter schools and supports Democratic candidates. Its 501(c)(3) nonprofit arm, Education Reform Now, has a board of directors that is composed of [finance industry executives](#). The PAC [announced in August 2018](#) that it planned to spend \$4 million on targeted state elections across the country. Governor Dan Malloy recently [joined DFER's](#) national advisory board and [spoke at a conference](#) organized by Education Reform Now.

Colin Dowell of Westport, the PAC chair, filed registration papers with an email address at Democrats for Education Reform (DFER). He shares the same street address as Amy Dowell, DFER's [Connecticut State Director](#). Amy is also treasurer of Democrats For Education Reform CT PAC, a "traditional" PAC that has directed most of its modest spending to support state Democratic party PACs. In 2016, Amy served as a [board member](#) of Education Reform Now Advocacy (ERNA), a 501(c)(4) "social welfare" organization associated with DFER. ERNA contributed \$65,250 to the Change Course CT PAC in 2016.

Change CT IE PAC's sole donor in 2018 was billionaire **Alice Walton**, who donated \$75,000. (See background on Walton in the profile above of the Build CT PAC.)

The PAC, which was formed in 2016, spent \$54,203 this year, with the largest share going to:

- Facebook advertising, \$18,3469 (34%)

- Consulting through Hilltop Public Solutions in D.C., \$17,000 (31%)
- Polling, \$14,781 (27%)

In addition to supporting Ned Lamont for Governor, it targeted its support to these Democratic state senate candidates, all of whom won their elections, and only one of whom (Steve Cassano) was an incumbent:

- Mary Daugherty Abrams (D, Meriden)
- Steve Cassano (D, Manchester)
- Christine Cohen (D, Guilford)
- William Haskell (D, New Canaan)
- James Maroney (D, Milford)

### **Change Connecticut PAC**

The Change Connecticut PAC was funded almost entirely by the Republican State Leadership Committee (RSLC), a national PAC that supports Republican candidates. Change Connecticut could be considered a party-affiliated PAC -- a partisan PAC that targets its funds to candidates of one party. While we are not classifying it as a charter school PAC like the others, it does have direct and indirect ties to the charter school industry, and may have been used to funnel money from a wealthy leader in that industry for local campaign use. The chair of the PAC is William Phillips, the former [board chair](#) of the Northeast Charter Schools Network and a donor to three charter school PACs. Brian Olson, who has donated to multiple charter school super PACs, also donated \$250,000 to the Republican State Leadership Committee (RSLC) in the 2018 election cycle. This was the largest donation from any Connecticut resident between January 2017 and September 2018. The RSLC, in turn, gave \$1.2 million to Change Connecticut, a super PAC that supported GOP state legislative candidates in the state. Olson is a [board member](#) of ConnCAN and of [Civic Builders](#), a nonprofit that supports charter school financing, design, and construction.

While Connecticut state law requires Connecticut super PACs to disclose their donors, wealthy donors can effectively avoid disclosure of how their donations were ultimately used by funneling their contributions through other organizations that then fund Connecticut super PACs. These difficult-to-trace funds are called "gray money." So while the RSLC must disclose its donors, including Brian Olson, it is not possible to know if Olson's contribution was earmarked in advance, in coordination with Phillips, for use in local races. In this way, charter industry advocates like Olson and Phillips might support their favored Republican candidates, while leaving responsibility for support of Democratic candidates to the super PACs that were overtly focused on charter schools. The Change Connecticut PAC spent more than \$100,000 opposing James Maroney, the Democratic candidate who opposed Pam Staneski in her state senate race. Staneski, as



described earlier in this report, was supported by the Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC, which received \$9,800 from Olson and his wife.

### **Super PACs from 2016 through 2018**

Three additional charter school super PACs were formed in 2016 and terminated in 2017. As we outline below, they share many donors with similar PACs, as well as connections to advocacy groups.

- **Charters Care PAC.** This PAC reported \$86,615 in income. All of the [officers](#) of the PAC were staff with the Northeast Charter School Network. Jeremiah Grace, chair of the PAC, was the Connecticut State Director of the Network. The PAC's treasurer, Christopher Harrington, was the Network's Policy Manager, and the Deputy treasurer, Jose Alfar, was their Advocacy Manager. The PAC supported both Democratic and Republican state legislative candidates.
- **Campaign for Connecticut's Future PAC.** The PAC received \$87,100 in income from Real Reform Now Network, a charter school advocacy group, and a small number of individual advocates. It supported Democratic and Republican candidates for the General Assembly in 2016, as well as some municipal candidates in 2017.
- **Equal Education for All PAC.** Formed in 2017, this PAC also has charter school ties. The chair of the PAC for most of 2018 was Kadisha Coates, a [former member](#) of the Bridgeport Board of Education who is a [charter school advocate](#). The PAC raised and spent little in 2018. It reported \$1,510 in income this year, including \$100 in small donations and \$1,410 from Richard Ferguson, who is profiled earlier in this report. It spent \$1,471, with most of that going to expenses incurred in 2017. It did not spend money for or against any 2018 candidates, so it is not included in our 2018 analysis. In 2017, it supported several Democratic candidates for City Council and both Democratic and Republican candidates for Board of Education in Bridgeport. The PAC has received \$32,522 in donations since 2016.

In addition, the total donations since 2016 to the charter school PACs that were active in 2018 were \$140,250 to Change Course CT, \$126,950 to Build CT, and \$39,521 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut.

### **Charter School Super PAC Donors, 2016-18**

The following is a list of major donors to Connecticut charter school super PACs reported on filings with the State Elections Enforcement Commission from 2016 through November 15 2018. Of the 26 total disclosed donors, most of them (15) have contributed to more than one of these super PACs. Most are individual donors, but two of the organizational donors are "dark money" groups that are not required to disclose

their donors. Most of the funding (58%) for these super PACs came from out-of-state donors.

Of the 22 individual donors, two-thirds (15) are current or former governing board members or staff of charter school advocacy organizations that operate in Connecticut and/or Connecticut charter schools. Specifically:

- Nine are current or former board members or staff of Achievement First or one of its 10 Connecticut charter schools.
- Seven are current or former board members or staff of ConnCAN or the Northeast Charter Schools Network.

The 22 major donors to charter school super PACs who have given at least \$1,000 since 2016 are:

- **Alice Walton, \$195,000.** Heir to Walmart fortune. See her profile in Build CT PAC section above. Donated \$100,000 to Build CT, \$75,000 to Change Course CT and \$20,000 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future.
- **Real Reform Now Network, \$70,000.** A dark money 501(c)(4) organization. Its [officers in 2016](#) were Kyle Rosenkranz, currently Director of Strategic Initiatives for KIPP NJ, a charter school in New Jersey and former CEO of the Northeast Charter Schools network; William Phillips (see profile below); and Jeremiah Grace, chair of the Charters Care PAC and former Connecticut State Director of the Northeast Charter Schools Network. Donated \$45,000 to the Charters Care PAC and \$25,000 to the Campaign for Connecticut's Future PAC.
- **Education Reform Now Advocacy, \$65,250.** A 501(c)(4) dark money group associated with Democrats for Education Reform. Donated to Change Course CT PAC.
- **Jim Walton, \$25,000.** Son of Walmart founder Sam Walton, brother of Alice, and part of the [wealthiest family](#) in the country. Chairman and CEO, Arvest Bank Group. Ranked by Forbes as the [11th wealthiest person](#) in the U.S. with assets of \$45 billion (as of 11/25/18). Donated to Campaign for Connecticut's Future PAC.
- **Anthony Davis, \$24,750.** [CEO](#) of Inherent Group, an investment firm. [Board member](#) of Achievement First. Donated \$20,000 to Equal Education for All PAC and \$4,750 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC.
- **Jonathan Sackler, \$21,500.** Heir to the Purdue Pharmaceuticals fortune. Managing Partner at Kokino LLC. Founding chairman of ConnCAN. [Board member](#) and founder of 50CAN, a national charter school advocacy organization. Former [board member](#) of the Northeast Charter Schools Network. Former [board member](#) at the NewSchools Venture Fund, which funds charter schools. Former [board member](#) of Achievement First, and of [Students for Education Reform](#), a charter school advocacy group. Sackler is a [major donor](#) to charter school advocacy

organizations. For example, he contributed [\\$70,000](#) to Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy during their Massachusetts referendum campaign. Donated \$18,000 to Charters Care PAC and \$3,500 to Build CT PAC.

- **Richard Ferguson, \$19,960.** Retired, former [Executive Vice President](#) of Cox Radio, [chair of the board](#) of the Elm City College Preparatory charter school. Donated to five of six charter school PACs: \$5,910 to Equal Education for All, \$4,800 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, \$4,750 to Build CT, \$3,000 for Charters Care, and \$1,500 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future.
- **Brian Olson, \$17,400.** Investor at Kokino LLC. Olson is a [board member](#) of ConnCAN and of [Civic Builders](#), a nonprofit that supports charter school financing, design, and construction. Donated \$10,000 to Charters Care, \$4,900 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, and \$2,500 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future.
- **John Irwin, \$14,650.** Managing Director at Hillside Capital and Brookside International. [Board member](#) of ConnCAN. Donated \$7,650 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC and \$7,000 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future PAC.
- **Kenneth Bartels, \$13,500.** Retired. Donated \$7,500 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC, \$4,000 to Build CT PAC, and \$2,000 to Equal Education for All PAC.
- **Andrew Boas, \$9,000.** General Partner, Carl Marks Management, LLC, an investment firm. [Board member](#) of ConnCAN. [Board chair](#) of Achievement First (charter school network). Former [board chair](#) of Achievement First Bridgeport Academy and former [board chair](#) of Amistad Academy charter school. Donated \$4,500 to Charters Care, \$3,500 to Build CT, and \$1,000 to Equal Education for All PAC.
- **Michael Griffin, \$7,500.** "Community activist" and [treasurer of the board](#) of the Amistad Academy charter school. Donated \$4,500 to Build CT PAC and \$3,000 to Equal Education for All PAC.
- **Joyce Critelli, \$5,000.** Retired. Former member of [advisory board](#) (though not the governing board) of ConnCAN. Donated to Campaign for Connecticut's Future PAC.
- **Jill Olson, \$4,900.** Wife of Brian Olson (see above). Donated to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut PAC.
- **Andrew Balson, \$4,500.** [Managing Partner](#), Cove Hill Partners, a private equity investment firm. Former executive at Bain Capital. Balson, who lives in Massachusetts, [donated \\$300,000](#) in 2016 to Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy during their campaign to pass a pro-charter school referendum initiative in that state. As described earlier in this report, FES Advocacy was [fined](#) for violating the law and failing to disclose its donors. Balson also contributed \$200,000 to Strong Economy for Growth, another organization that supported

the referendum campaign and [was also fined](#) for failing to disclose its donors. Finally, Balson was a major donor to the Connecticut's Bright Future PAC, contributing \$25,000 this year to the Connecticut super PAC that supported Republican Gubernatorial candidate David Stemerma. Donated to Charters Care PAC.

- **William "Bill" Phillips, \$3,900.** [President](#), Future Generations Advocacy Project. Former [board chair](#) of the Northeast Charter Schools Network. Phillips is the chair of the Change Connecticut PAC, one of the largest super PACs in the state. It received \$1.2 million from the Republican State Leadership Committee in 2018 to support Republican candidates for the General Assembly. Donated \$2,400 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, \$1,000 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future, and \$500 to Charters Care.
- **Prepare Our Future Workforce, \$3,000.** This donor was listed with an address at a Hartford apartment building, but does not appear to be registered as a business, lobbyist, or nonprofit in the state. Donated to Build CT PAC.
- **Christopher Kunhardt, \$2,500.** Retired, [former executive](#) at J.P. Morgan. [Chair of the board](#) of the Achievement First Bridgeport Academy charter school. Donated \$1,000 to Build CT, \$1,000 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, and \$500 to Equal Education for All.
- **Carolyn Greenspan, \$1,500.** CEO of Blue State Coffee. [Board chair](#) of the Amistad Academy charter school and [former board member](#) of Elm City College Preparatory charter school. Donated to Build CT PAC.
- **Peter Orthwein, \$1,200.** Executive Chairman of Thor Industries, Inc., a recreational vehicle manufacturer. Donated \$1,000 to Leaders for a Stronger Connecticut, \$100 to Build CT, and \$100 to Campaign for Connecticut's Future.
- **Alex Johnston, \$1,000.** [President](#) and founder of Impact for Education, a philanthropic advisory organization. Co-founder and former CEO of ConnCAN. Board member of FaithACTS for Education. Board member and former chair of the Policy Innovators in Education Network, a network of education advocacy organizations that includes many charter school groups. Donated to Charters Care PAC.
- **Anthony Roncalli, \$1,000.** [Attorney](#) at Norton Rose Fulbright. Donated to Build CT PAC.

The PACs collectively received only \$948 in donations of \$500 or less, including \$133 in small donations below the level required for public disclosure of the donors. Three disclosed donors under \$1,000 were also current or former board or staff of charter schools or advocacy organizations. In addition to these monetary donations, these super PACs received additional support from these sources since 2016:

- William Phillips, a \$2,656 loan to Build CT.

- CT Forward, \$550 in in-kind support to Equal Education for All.
- Families for Excellent Schools Advocacy, a \$9,887 in-kind contribution to Equal Education for All.

## **Conclusion**

This report shows how monied interests, specifically the charter school industry, games our electoral system in a way that undermines peoples' votes and hides the duplicitous manner in which they operate.

In Connecticut in 2018 this included:

- Setting up so called independent PACs for each of the major parties and even spending to support candidates opposing one another in one State Senate district.
- Utilizing a strategy to spend in races that were not competitive in an attempt to curry favor with the winners, a cynical ploy. Many of the so-called beneficiaries would have preferred money be spent improving their local public school systems.
- Masking their strategy by establishing multiple committees, using misleading names, and participating in hiding their activities through a legislative party super PAC.

Since candidates are not permitted to coordinate with independent expenditure efforts, candidates did not affirmatively agree to this spending. What candidate would affirmatively want mountains of money spent on their behalf by Alice Walton, the nation's largest spender on efforts to destroy public education and whose fortunes are based on a business model that undermines small businesses and keeps people in poverty?

The question is whether the shady practices of the charter school industry – spending large sums of money to influence public policy to make more money for itself, shift control of public education to private hands, and drive wedges between parents in communities of color and teacher unions – will help them advance their agenda, or is sunlight really the best disinfectant? This behavior is at odds with our democracy.

## **Sources**

Data on income, donors, and spending by Connecticut super PACs are from PAC filings with the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) from January 2016 through November 15, 2018. PAC expenses include those that are paid, as well as those incurred

but unpaid as of the last filing. Paid expenses figures were generated using SEEC's [disbursement search tool](#). Outstanding incurred but unpaid expenses were from the PACs' final reports. Donations were summarized from SEEC's [receipts search tool](#). Many additional sources are in hyperlinks above.

## **About Us**

**Common Cause in Connecticut** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizens' lobby working for open, honest, and accountable government for everyone. Our activism helped secure and continues to protect the strongest campaign finance law in the nation, the Citizens' Election Program, while also working to protect voting rights and advance racial and economic justice. We have over one million members and activists nationwide.

The **Connecticut Citizen Action Group** (CCAG) is a statewide membership based organization dedicated to actively engaging the residents of Connecticut in altering the relations of power in order to build a more just society.

For our previous reports on super PAC spending, see our website at [ConnectTheDollars.weebly.com](http://ConnectTheDollars.weebly.com). Visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/ConnectTheDollarsProject](http://www.facebook.com/ConnectTheDollarsProject).

Michael Sullivan contributed research and writing assistance for this report.