

Senator Langerholc, and the rest of the committee here today, I want to personally thank you for providing me the opportunity to present to you my thoughts cyber charter school reform and funding. My name is Dr. Mark Kudlawiec, and I am the superintendent of the Chestnut Ridge School District, and I am honored to sit before you today. I have worked in public education for the last 32 years as a teacher, principal, director of vocational education, and now the superintendent of schools. In the last three decades, more so over the last decade, in particular, I have seen a paradigm shift of more students leaving public schools for cyber schools.

In a county such as Bedford, we are an impoverished county with over 14.2% living at or below the poverty level. Some of the students in my district are well over the 20% threshold of poverty today. That equates, at a minimum, to a 1 out of every seven individuals in this county living in poverty. That being said, the one thing we are struggling with is that we can't afford to lose money with unaffiliated cyber schools. Last year, the Chestnut Ridge School District spent \$391,213.53 or, 2% of our budget on unaffiliated cyber school costs. That amount would also equate to 8 mills of tax revenue I have to replace that school year. The school districts that Senator Langerholc represents spent over ten million dollars on cyber school alone for the 2018-19 school year. Over the last five years, my district has spent \$1,411,233 on cyber school costs and an additional \$512,216 on brick and mortar charter school costs. That is a total of 1,923,449 dollars or almost an average of just under \$400,000 per year.

As I start my ninth year as the superintendent of this district, I ask myself if that is the best use of taxpayer dollars. Because although these schools advertise that they are tuition-free, the money comes from the school districts those students reside. A point that you may or may not know is that every district here, speaking today, runs their in-house cyber program. At Chestnut Ridge, we run a cyber program that holds students accountable, that encourages them to attend and participate in school functions and activities, can custom blend your child's curriculum to fit their daily educational needs, and most importantly, truly care about the overall wellness and success of your child. Do you think that Commonwealth Connections Academy cares about your child's success? Last year, I had a student attend Commonwealth Connections Academy, and after that student missed 108 days, they were finally dropped from their rolls and dropped out of school entirely. However, my district did receive a bill for an estimated \$8,000 for that child, and I ask you for what?

That is just one of the stories I can tell you about some of the experiences my district has with cybers schools. I know that some cyber schools are a good fit for students and I don't dispell that. However, as I said previously, why not use your district's cyber school? That is a school that knows your child and truly cares about their success.

In closing, I am asking you to support a fair funding formula for cyber schools and to hold them to greater accountability. I think it is safe to say that nobody here would buy a product that only received one star out of a five-star rating. So I ask any parent that has a child attending one of those schools with a sub-par rating, is this the best option for your child? As a superintendent, that has three children of my own, I know I wouldn't.

Thank you for your time,

Dr. Mark Kudlawiec