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CHARTER SCHOOL HEARING TESTIMONY SUMMARY

Senate Education Policy Committee Hearing
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When the Pennsylvania legislature passed the charter school law in 1997 and amended it in 2002 to include cyber charters, many believed the combination of autonomy, flexibility and accountability of the schools would lead to innovative and better results for students.

For far too many students, that has not been the case.

Instead of supporting the growth of autonomous high-quality options for students, Pennsylvania's law has contributed to its stagnation.

Given the consistently poor performance of cyber charter schools and the students who attend them, a change in the cyber charter law is necessary to support the growth of higher quality charter school options students deserve.

I'm here today to share suggestions on how changes to the state cyber charter laws can provide more parents, students and families with access to the high-quality choices the charter school law originally envisioned. These changes can:

1. Protect taxpayer interests

In 2016, school districts paid approximately \$1.6 billion dollars in charter school payments.

During the same period, roughly 2015 – 2017, cyber charter school students performed far worse than their peers attending traditional public schools and brick and mortar schools. Cyber charter students performed as if they had nearly a year less learning in reading and year

less learning in math than students in traditional public schools and brick and mortar schools.

A fiscally sound law would address: (1) payment generally and (2) standardize wildly varying rates school districts are paying for the same product.

2. Establish consistency in payments for special education

The special education funding formula was adopted and became law. The formula should be applied to cyber charter school students to better align payment with the actual level of need a student receiving special education services has.

3. Provide cyber charter operators with fair and consistent rules and processes

Standardize the process for amendments, renewals, revocations, appeals and new applications.

4. Keep bad actors out

Charter school operators and leadership with a history of significant academic gains and strong performance for students, fiscal stability, a sound organizational structure, and backgrounds free from criminal activity should be allowed to open schools.

5. Incentivize strong performance and fiscal responsibility

Although no cyber charter schools currently meet this standard, cyber charter schools that post high scores and gains for students, that are fiscally solvent and organizationally sound should be allowed to expand and receive longer charter terms.

6. Raise the level of quality seats available to students

If a cyber charter schools posts consistently poor results, after three years, the school should be shut down. These seats can be given to high performing charter schools.

7. Protect parents and students when cyber charters are failing

If a cyber charter school is closing, require the school to provide parents and students with enough time to research other school options and meet application deadlines for other schools.

Other states have adopted or amended their laws to improve the overall quality of charter schools. In fact, between 2012 and 2017, 23 states did. Pennsylvania did not.

The power to bring this antiquated law into the 21st century so that PA's students are prepared for this century's demands rests with you. I urge you to take the action that supports higher quality choices for students and their families.