



SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
April 19, 2021

TESTIMONY OF KEVIN MCCOY
12TH GRADE STUDENT, TECH FREIRE CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Good morning Senators Martin and Williams and the Senate Education Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to participate in today's hearing on the importance of school choice.

My name is Kevin McCoy and I am a 12th grade student at TECH Freire High School, a public charter school in North Philadelphia with an enrollment preference for students residing in the Strawberry Mansion catchment in which I live.

I am here today to demonstrate the profound impact TECH Freire and the public charter system have had on my life, and why it is so vital that students like me have a choice of where they go to school in grades K-12.

For those of you not familiar with it, the high school selection process in Philadelphia is grueling. I had big education dreams and knew getting into a good high school was critical to achieving them. But, as I was finishing 8th grade, I learned that I had not been accepted into any of the special admission School District of Philadelphia high schools. I knew that my neighborhood high school was one of the most tumultuous schools in America located in one of Philly's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. I remember thinking to myself that my education dreams were crushed in front of my eyes. Then I learned about TECH Freire, a new public

charter high school that specializes in computer science and entrepreneurship. My mom had never heard of it before and neither had I; she forced me to apply to TECH Freire's lottery, and I did so thinking it was my last shot. Turns out, I was actually exercising a powerful choice -- a choice that allowed me to access the best education for me and my future.

One of the things I love most about TECH Freire is that they give students of color opportunities not found at other public schools. You see, going to TECH Freire didn't just stop me from going to my neighborhood school, it was a second chance full of MANY new opportunities for me and my classmates. At TECH Freire, I have:

- Made Honor Roll 14 times and served as Vice President of the National Honors Society.
- Had a short story published and received the 2019 Young Writers Storytelling Award.
- Participated in the STEM Summer Program at the University of Pennsylvania, where I won a sustainability award in 2018, a teamwork award in 2019, and a social justice award in 2020.
- Was a scholar in Teach for America's ROOTS program.
- Served as a peer tutor in English and math.

TECH Freire believes that all students can achieve, and because of that, they nurture every student to be their best self. I would not have received this kind of attention at my neighborhood school.

Additionally, students from charter high schools have a higher probability of graduating and attending college¹. And from personal experience, I've seen this to be true. When it came time to apply for college, I felt that I had a lot more options than I did in the high school application process; options that were available to me because I chose to go to TECH Freire. Last fall, I was accepted to six colleges. In August, I will join Temple University as a psychology major and Provost Scholar, a prestigious scholarship awarded to first-generation college students. This would not have been possible without the hands-on learning, technology education, leadership opportunities, unmatched staff support, and student empowerment at TECH Freire. Even if I didn't know it at the time, TECH Freire was the best high school for me. More students – including the 25,000 on charter waitlists in Philadelphia – deserve to go to their best fit school, too.

I am here today to ask for your continued support of school choice which empowers students of color, including young Black men like me. In a school district with limited high quality options, charter schools allow students to thrive through innovative programming, personalized attention, and abundant opportunities to find your passion. Even when it's not your original plan, when you choose to attend the school that best meets your needs it can be a life changing experience. This kind of experience should be a fundamental right for all families in Pennsylvania.

Again, thank you to the Senate Education Committee for allowing me to testify before you and I look forward to answering any of your questions.

¹ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9428.html