



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PHILADELPHIA

**William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.**  
Superintendent

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May 14, 2019

The Honorable Jordan A. Harris  
Democratic Whip  
PA House of Representatives  
428 Main Capitol Building  
PO Box 202186  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2186

The Honorable Jason T. Dawkins  
Chair of the Philadelphia Delegation  
PA House of Representatives  
32B East Wing  
PO Box 202179  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2179

Dear Representatives Harris and Dawkins:

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of the children of Philadelphia and your efforts to secure permanent, fair funding for Philadelphia's public schools.

Ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality school, District or charter, is our top priority. The House is considering four bills that make significant changes to the state's charter school law, including two bills that significantly weaken our ability to accomplish this goal. I write to ask that you stand united on behalf of high-quality schools for Philadelphia students.

House Bill 355 (Reese) and House Bill 358 (Marshall), are bills that improve the ethics and conflict of interest provisions in the current law, and expand dual enrollment opportunities for charter school students. We support and urge a YES vote on these bills.

House Bill 356 (Dowling) and House Bill 357 (Topper) will limit the District's ability to authorize high-quality charter schools and would adversely impact our hard-won, stable financial position. For the following specific reasons, we urge a NO vote on HB 356 and HB 357:

1. **HB 356 and 357 erode the District's ability to ensure quality choices for students.** The standard application form proposed in the bill lacks information on an applicant's experience, finances, past performance and operational ability, all of which are necessary to determine whether the applicant can successfully open and operate a school. Districts would be prohibited from requesting additional information that is important to their local context. The renewal process in the bill lacks a comprehensive application and provides only 90 days for review of a charter's student performance, financial health and operations,

which we know from experience is not enough time when reviewing multiple schools. While we already provide for and support a locally defined mid-term amendment process, we oppose making mid-term, discretionary amendments appealable to the Charter Appeals Board, which will only create additional litigation.

2. **HB 356 and HB 357 will negatively impact the District's financial stability.** The District has stabilized its finances and been able to improve academic outcomes for 131,000 students in District operated schools. These bills would allow charter schools - even those with failing performance - to expand enrollment without District knowledge or approval. Uncontrolled expansion will create significant, unbudgeted new expenses, jeopardizing the District's recent upgrade to an Investment Grade credit rating and imperiling planned improvements to District programs, staffing, and facilities, and undermining long-term financial stability.
3. **HB 356 and HB 357 prevent local districts from providing appropriate oversight and protection of their students.** The District is responsible for the education of all 204,000 Philadelphia public school students, including those in charter schools. The legislation frees charters from oversight that is necessary to ensure they are meeting academic standards, protecting students' civil rights and keeping them free from harm. While some charters are high performing, some perform well below comparable District schools, and have significant financial and operational problems. The bill would make it even harder to close those schools and allow children to move to higher performing schools.

We support any efforts that will ensure all students have access to high-quality schools. We stand ready to work with you and your House colleagues to amend the proposed legislation in ways that will serve the best interests of all children.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite, Jr., Ed.D.

c: Philadelphia Delegation