



March 11, 2009

Chairman (Stephen) Dyer, Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Ranking Minority Member, (Seth) Morgan

Chairman Dyer, ranking minority member Morgan, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee-

My name is Bill Sims and I am President and CEO of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on matters of significant concern to the Alliance and community charter schools and parents across the state of Ohio.

In a manner of speaking, charter schools represent the largest public school "district" in the state with over 80,000 students- larger than the Columbus Public Schools, the Cleveland Municipal Schools, for that matter larger than Cleveland and Dayton school districts combined. Yet I want to be clear and unambiguous when I say that the Governor's budget and education plan as it stands, with its funding reductions and exclusions, will seriously harm community charter schools in the state, likely causing the closure of the majority of charter schools in Ohio over the next biennium, impacting the lives and families of these 80,000 plus students and dealing a fatal blow to school choice.

My time is limited so I will focus on three areas of deepest concern.

FIRST - The budget calls for reductions in charter-school funding from \$617M to \$497M. That's an across-the-board cut of 20%. Separately, e-schools will realize 60-70% cuts in funding. Charter schools, without local



property tax support and without facilities support already are functioning at 60-70% of tradition public-school student funding. With these cuts charter school kids will on average be carrying only 50-60% of the funding in their backpacks as their district counterparts. Without correction, this is nothing short of “Separate and Unequal” treatment and raises serious constitutional questions. Parents are reasonably asking, why is my child only worth 60% of a district school student. The federal stimulus stabilization funds require assurances that the state maintains at least 2008 funding levels for K-12 education, and presumably that means not just for some public schools.

SECOND - The rationale for segregating charter schools in the state budget to a separate line item escapes us, unless the purpose is to be able to further cut charter funding without impacting district school students. Why else would one put some public schools on one line and other public schools on another?

THIRD – When funding resources are cut so dramatically, quality suffers. The Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools is an association committed to high-quality achievement among all of Ohio’s charter schools. The governor has spoken of wanting to support quality charter schools, as has the U.S Secretary of Education, and eloquently so the President of the United States. Yet these dramatic cuts seem counter to the administration’s rhetoric. There are direct correlations between fundamental nutrition and health and schools are no different. Starve them, suffocate them, whatever the metaphor and eventually they either die or they become incapacitated.



But the threat to quality here is more complex. Charter school student bodies are on average 63% poverty compared to 37% on average for district schools. This is an important point. Suffocating charter schools disproportionately impacts disadvantaged families. Furthermore, for some peculiar reason, charter schools have been excluded also from the Ohio Instructional Quality Index (known as the Ohio IQ). It's a well-known fact that charter schools are concentrated in Ohio's urban areas. The federal stimulus dollars also require assurances that actions be taken to ensure poor and minority children are not taught by less experienced teachers. The Ohio IQ is a deliberate attempt to give schools in distressed areas more money to be able to attract and hire top-quality teachers. Why would anyone want to exclude charter schools from such an important policy plan? What would the motives be?

By Ohio law charter schools are public schools. Charter school parents are interested in nothing more or less than fair and equitable treatment for their children. When Ohio legislators established charter schools their intent was obviously not to create an underprivileged class of public schools - and certainly not a class of separate and unequal schools.

Thank you Chairman Dyer
Ranking Minority Member Morgan
And Committee Members