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HOUSE BILL 64 TESTIMONY OF REBECCA LINDNER FRIENDS OF BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOLS

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Driehaus, and members of the House Finance & Appropriations Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64.

My name is Rebecca Lindner, a third-grade teacher at Breakthrough Schools, a network representing 10, soon to be 11, high performing community schools in Cleveland. Breakthrough Schools is the second highest performing network of public community schools in the State of Ohio.

Our student population is 96% minority and 84% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Yet for the 3rd year in a row, Breakthrough continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio. In 2012-2013, Breakthrough students, on average, outperformed their peers across the city, county, and state in every subject.

I would like to take a moment to discuss HB 64 and the challenges faced by high performing community schools as it relates to obtaining and maintaining buildings and facilities.

My scholars are very lucky to have a safe, secure building for school. We have secure entrances and exits, and we are very thankful for that. However, with increased funding for facilities, we could provide more for our scholars. First of all, our rooms are not all the same size. This is due to the fact that we are in a building that was not meant to be a school. Our school is in an old factory. Our 3rd-8th grade scholars are in rooms that are smaller than the kindergarten-2nd grade rooms. We have just enough room for all 31 of our scholars in my classroom, but we don't have extra space for teacher desks, an easel for making anchor charts or a reading nook. Moving to a space that was designed as a school would allow for a classroom that is appropriately sized for all of these important things. Another downside to being in an old factory is that we do not have a playground. Due to the fact that our scholars do not have a safe outdoor space, they do not get to engage in outdoor recess. Research cited in the book, *Justice, Conflict and Wellbeing* by Catherine M. Bohn-Gettler and Anthony D. Pellegrini shows many benefits to outdoor recess such as improved physical health, classroom behavior, social competency, achievement and cognition. If we were able to move to a facility that was designed for a school that had a playground or safe outdoor space, we could expose our scholars to these benefits. These examples are just the beginning of benefits that increased facilities funding could bring to our school.

I implore you to support the provision in HB 64, which creates a \$25 million building fund that can be accessed by schools sponsored by exemplary sponsors. The concept is much needed and we wholeheartedly support the idea of a building fund. We recommend however that the concept of exemplary sponsor be removed and replaced with a system that focuses on high performing community schools regardless of sponsor. We also suggest the inclusion of a public-private matching concept, whereby community schools that can raise dollars from their local communities can have those dollars matched by this building fund for purposes of acquiring or upgrading a school building. These changes would ensure that money in the building fund would be targeted to highly rated, community supported schools that could also generate savings for the state through providing community matching dollars.

I also encourage you to support the provision in House Bill 64 which increases the per pupil funding for public charter school facilities from \$100 to \$200. Having the resources to renovate underutilized or blighted buildings, for public charter schools help revitalize neighborhoods and attracted new residents and businesses. As such, financing charter school facilities doesn't just help students; it helps entire communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.