

House Bill 49 testimony

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Good morning, Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 49.

My name is Andy Boy, and I'm the founder and CEO of the United Schools Network in Columbus. USN operates three high-performing charter schools in Franklinton and East Columbus that collectively serve more than 620 students. Nearly 100% of our students are economically disadvantaged and more than 80% are students of color. Despite the challenges they face, our students achieve proficiency levels that match and even surpass those of students in wealthier, neighboring suburbs. We accomplish this by a relentless focus on school culture, high expectations for teachers and students, and the belief that all children can and will learn when given the right supports and opportunities.

It is this belief that unites many of my high-performing peer charter networks across the state: schools like Breakthrough Schools in Cleveland, Dayton's Early College Academy and network schools, KIPP Columbus and the Graham Family of Schools here in Columbus. I have had many conversations with the superintendents and leaders of these networks; we've come to realize over time that we have more in common than just a commitment to quality, good business practices, and impressive student academic gains. We've also faced immense resources challenges when attempting to grow, expand, or replicate our schools to serve more students and families.

Several of these charter schools tapped into the \$25 million competitive classroom facilities grant that was put in place in the FY 2016-17 budget. One of USN's schools, Columbus Collegiate Academy, applied for and won \$1.7 million for the renovation of a historic public school building that will add much needed space for our students with special needs and for our STEM and arts programming. DECA Prep was awarded almost \$800,000 for expansion, and I believe you heard last week from John Zitzner of Breakthrough Schools in Cleveland, who noted his network's award of \$6.5 million. These funds offered a vital lifeline to some of Ohio's very best performing charter schools to grow to meet the educational needs of students in neighborhoods where there are few or no high-quality school options. I want to thank you—on behalf of the children and families we serve—for making that possible.

The need for high-quality school options remains, however. And that need is great. At USN, we've identified that more than 30,000 students in Columbus still do not have access to a quality K-12 school. In our near east side neighborhood, nearly all of the traditional public schools can be found on the parent trigger list – a list made up of schools that are in the bottom 5% of performance persistently in the state. We must move with urgency.

Unfortunately, the facilities grant for high-performing charters was not included in HB 49. At the same time, HB 49 also maintains the current allotment of \$200 per pupil for facilities as well as base foundation funding (\$6,000). All of which is to say, USN and other high-performing charter networks actually have access to *fewer* resources than we did two years ago when trying to grow. Ohio charters, unable to raise local money, are funded at about one third less and face considerable resource challenges when it comes to securing school buildings. An extension of the classroom facilities grant would help us immensely in growing to serve more students and families. Even better, you might

consider a dedicated stream of facilities funding for Ohio's highest performing charter networks. With an additional \$1,000 in facilities funds for each child in high-performing brick and mortar community schools, our network could more easily and more effectively serve more students in neighborhoods like the near east.

While we know that this year's budget is tight, and many schools around the state may be flatly funded, our request would direct funds in a targeted way toward those charter networks that have a proven track record of excellence serving our state's most disadvantaged students.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.