



Testimony by Penn Berens in Support of Charter Facilities Funding

Good afternoon, Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64.

I am Penn Berens, a grand parent to eleven children. I am also a management consultant with experience in both health and education. I am here today as a member of StudentsFirst Ohio in support of the public charter school facilities provisions of House Bill 64.

Every child deserves a quality public education regardless of the type of public school he or she attends. Providing public charter schools with access and funding for facilities empowers parents by ensuring they have quality school choices for their children.

Currently, most public charter schools in Ohio face significant obstacles when trying to construct, purchase, or lease suitable facilities. Public charter schools do not enjoy the same favorable lending terms as traditional school districts and are not automatically provided with space. As a result, public charter schools are often forced to settle for less-than-ideal spaces for their students to learn in, such as former stores or office buildings.

House Bill 64 increases the per pupil funding for public charter school facilities from \$100 to \$200. This increase is to be funded by lottery profits. In addition, the bill creates a \$25 million state facilities fund for public charter schools with sponsors rated exemplary.

Facilities programs for public charter schools can have broad benefits for neighborhoods and cities. Public charter schools can successfully attract private investment to neighborhoods that was not otherwise available. The Intergenerational School has done that twice: First into an underutilized old maritime/psych hospital in Cleveland, and more recently, in the vacant St. Luke's Hospital building, also in Cleveland. By renovating underutilized or blighted buildings, public charter schools helped revitalize neighborhoods and attracted new residents and businesses. As such, financing charter school facilities doesn't just help students; it helps entire communities.

The increase in per pupil funding called for in HB 64 will be very beneficial to the more than 108,000 charter school students in Ohio.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. Please support the public charter school facilities provisions of HB 64 to help ensure all Ohio children, regardless of their zip code, have high quality school options.