

Testimony in Support of HB 64 / Charter School Facilities

Good afternoon, Chairman Cupp, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. My name is Emily Jeffries, and I am a teacher at Breakthrough Charter Schools in Cleveland. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64.

As you know, 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.

I support House Bill 64, which increases the per pupil funding for public charter school facilities from \$100 to \$200. In addition, the bill creates a \$25 million state facilities fund for public charter schools with sponsors rated exemplary. I encourage the legislature to support both of these initiatives, but would hope the \$25 million building fund would be accessible to high-quality charter schools regardless of sponsor. Currently, it costs our school \$800 per student to ensure adequate facilities for transformational learning.

My own experience supports a case for ensuring public charter schools have access and funding for facilities. I chose to work for Breakthrough, believing that all children in our nation are capable of achieving at high levels and all children deserve access to a quality education. As a second grade teacher, that belief is affirmed daily by my students. When our scholars are held to unapologetic, unrelentingly high standards for academics and behavior, they respond! They rise to the occasion and perform at high levels. Even our youngest scholars participate in discussions by speaking in complete sentences, with strong voices. They sit up respectfully and look at whoever is speaking. They critique and analyze different mathematical approaches. They turn in high-quality homework for every subject every night. In an area where many doubt their ability to succeed, our scholars are internalizing what it means to have a no-excuses attitude and fight for their own success.

There is a “magic” to what we do in this city, but it is a replicable magic. We’ve learned it from other entities, and others can learn it from us. We can change the face of urban education in Cleveland, and in the State of Ohio, modeling what transformational change can look like for the rest of the nation.

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