



## **Testimony in Support of Charter Facilities**

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 Rebecca Lindner and I work at Breakthrough Schools, the most successful charter school system in Cleveland. I am also a member of StudentsFirst Ohio. I am here in support of the public charter school facilities provisions of House Bill 64.

Every child deserves a quality education regardless of the type of 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. In addition, the bill creates a \$25 million state facilities fund for public charter schools with sponsors rated exemplary. We 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.

Facilities programs for public charter schools can have broad benefits for neighborhoods and cities. For example, Washington, D.C.'s programs have allowed public charter schools to successfully attract private investment to neighborhoods that was not otherwise available. 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. Additionally, allowing public charter schools to purchase surplus facilities can be a revenue source for a financially struggling school district.

My scholars, who attend a Breakthrough school, 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, we sometimes have to improvise to fix problems. My classroom, like the other classrooms in the building, has carpet squares. Some of our squares are detaching from the floor. To fix this, we have duct taped the squares back down. With more facilities funding, perhaps our school could replace the carpet squares. In addition, 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 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade

scholars are in rooms that are smaller than the kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup> 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 three examples are just the beginning of benefits that increased facilities funding could bring to our school.

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.