



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.

My name is Mark Lenart, and I am the Managing Member of Tranel, LLC, a facilities planning and project management consultant, working for Breakthrough Schools, the most successful charter school system in Cleveland. As a member of StudentsFirst Ohio, we are here to support 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.

As the lead consultant on all design, construction and real estate matters for the Breakthrough Charter Schools, we feel the need for greater equality related to facilities funding. We are often challenged by the need to make decisions regarding warm, safe and secure conditions over advancement of the educational needs of the students.

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.