



## 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 Frederick Freer, an educational consultant from Shaker Heights, Ohio and 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 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. 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. 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 own experience supports a case for ensuring public charter schools have access and funding for facilities.

Having worked for some of the highest-performing public charter schools in the State of Ohio, I can attest firsthand to the challenges with facilities funding. Every child and parent should have the expectation that the school environment will be warm, safe, and dry so that it may be the most conducive for learning. And the schools with which I have served all meet that standard. And yet, frequently, the buildings that have been taken over or repurposed for use as public charter schools have suffered from decades of neglect, thus forcing the charter schools to make up for this long term lack of maintenance. *They are effectively forced to absorb legacy costs as part of the process of*

*providing quality education.* Consequently, facilities challenges, which are myriad, can include entire roofs which can no longer be patched and repaired but must be replaced at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Mortar joints and caulking, that went unmaintained for decades, may have permitted damage not readily seen but which clearly impacts the provision of a warm, safe, and dry environment. The correction of long overdue facilities maintenance also has a clear and deleterious effect on budgets.

I have seen firsthand the quality education being provided by Breakthrough Charter Schools, among others, and believe that House Bill 64's doubling of per pupil funding for public charter school facilities is a step in the right direction.

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.