

## **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 Curtis Walker and I am a middle school English Language Arts teacher in the Breakthrough Charter School Network in Northeast Ohio. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64.

I serve 91 students each day at Entrepreneurship Preparatory School, a public charter school founded in 2006. We engage students every minute of the day with systems that are designed to increase productivity and overall student performance. We have high academic expectations that emphasize academic rigor, clear expectations, and accountable talk. Each day, I embrace the opportunity to educate our bright, young minds in a community that I call home.

I grew up in the same neighborhood as my students and encountered similar challenges my students face each day, living in an urban and underprivileged region in the city. When I see my students each day, I see a resemblance of myself. I remember the unfavorable odds and challenges I faced simply because of my zip code, alongside the constant desire to attain a quality education. This is what fuels my craft each day as I enter my classroom to motivate, inspire and produce transformational change for a better tomorrow through the power of education.

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 us \$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. My students are prime examples of that. They are able to read and write to explore their own thinking, engage in reflection, and they continue to learn each day that they have control over improving their craft. As my students master the stylistic elements of language, literature and writing, they are being transformed into well-qualified candidates for admission into Northeast Ohio's top performing, college preparatory high schools.

They know that they must have a greater respect for themselves and for others. They know that they must hold themselves accountable for all of their actions, thoughts and beliefs. Our students have the courage to stand up for their values and beliefs, even when it's not the most popular or easiest thing to do. Our students stay focused on their paths to success and opportunity and they do not give up when challenges and failure occur.

We can change the face of urban education in Northeast Ohio 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.

Curtis Walker  
English Language Arts Teacher, Grades 5 & 7  
Entrepreneurship Preparatory Schools :: Cliffs Campus  
1417 E. 36th Street  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114  
216.773.1855  
cwalker@theprepschools.org  
theprepschools.org