



**Before the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 581 – Enact the Charter School Oversight Act
Sponsor Testimony by Representative Beryl Brown Piccolantonio and
Representative Dani Isaacsohn
Tuesday, December 3rd, 2024**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony, along with my joint sponsor Representative Brown Piccolantonio on House Bill 581. This legislation would enact the “Charter School Oversight Act” to bring Ohio’s community schools more in line with our public schools.

Community schools in Ohio—known widely as charter schools elsewhere—were authorized by the General Assembly in 1997 with the intention of promoting competition, innovation, and choice.¹ Community schools in Ohio are public schools, and they are tuition-free, non-religious, nonprofit, and open to any student.² Like traditional public schools, they are required to submit to state and federal regulations regarding transparency, state testing, financial audits, and academic standards. However, Ohio law allows community schools to skirt around regulations that public schools are held to, despite increased funding from the state in recent years.³

We’ve all heard the stories of the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, or ECOT, an online charter school authorized by the state of Ohio in 2000, effectively scamming the state of \$117 million that has still not been paid back.⁴ Additional oversight helps ensure that we will maintain quality community schools in our state.

The purpose of this legislation is to increase oversight of these public community schools to a level closer to that of traditional public schools. The current system of oversight simply does not cut it for Ohio’s children, and has led to less-than-promised results in charter schools.

In 2023, nearly 9 out of 10 Ohio charter schools were ranked in the bottom quartile of all high schools nationwide. The top performing charter school in the state,

¹ [Charter Schools | Encyclopedia of Cleveland History](#)

² [Ohio Community Schools Governance: An Overview](#)

³ [The Impact of Increasing Funding for High-Performing Ohio Charter Schools](#)

⁴ [ECOT owes Ohio \\$117 Million. What are we going to do about it?](#)

KIPP Columbus, still ranked lower than two Akron Public Schools, two Cincinnati public schools, three Cleveland municipal schools, a Columbus City School, and a Dayton City School.⁵

Good, responsible government means holding these charter schools accountable, and it's past due that we institute greater oversight over these schools receiving public money to make sure our students have the best chance at success.

The bill also prohibits DEW or an educational service center from sponsoring any additional community schools that have either had a sponsor choose not to renew or has been declared unauditable. This is to ensure that we have sponsors and community schools in place that are committed to serving Ohioans, not swiping \$117 million of their taxpayer dollars.

Lastly, the bill requires a community or STEM school to notify the parent or guardian of any student enrolling in that school from a traditional school district of the results of the most recent state report card issued for that school. This is to ensure that parents can accurately compare schools to ensure they are sending their child to the school that is best for them.

Just a few weeks ago, Ohio Auditor Keith Faber's Special Investigations Unit launched an investigation into the Cincinnati Charter School Collaborative after Dohn Community School, a charter school with locations in my district, terminated its relationship with the operating company that ran the school.⁶ The Auditor's Special Investigation Unit investigates allegations of misused public and taxpayer money, fraud, and corruption.

We cannot keep hearing stories of community schools misusing public funds and doing nothing to prevent it. That is why we must enact the Charter School Oversight Act to stop bad actors from defrauding not only the taxpayers, but the students they promised to help. I hope this bill is only a start in ensuring the best results for all of Ohio's students, regardless of what type of school they attend.

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for your consideration of HB 581. I look forward to your questions.

⁵ [10th Period: All But 5 Ohio Charter Schools Rank in Bottom 25% of Schools Nationally](#)

⁶ [Cincinnati charter school company under state investigation after being fired from Dohn](#)