

Testimony 1

Good afternoon Good Morning Chair Richardson and fellow committee members:

My name is Sulayman Santiago, and I am 11 and a half years old. I am a student attending Sunrise Academy, a non-public charter school.

I am here to talk about why private and non-public charter schools are very important and everyone should be able to go to them. Let me start by asking a question: how many children go to juvenile detention centers each year? 60,000 are incarcerated.

I was recently almost a part of that 60,000 until I became enrolled in the Sunrise Academy. At first, I did not care that I was going to non-public school, but now I'm the happiest I have ever been. I have a best friend. I actually like my teachers, and I'm having a great time while learning. In the past, I was much more violent, used to be a delinquent, and spoke profanely.

At my old school, I got suspended twice and had many lunch and recess detentions—things I would never even think of doing now. Being in Sunrise Academy means that I am able to still be challenged by the curriculum in a supportive environment with personalized attention from my teachers, which has helped me turn my life around.

Now, I am a completely different person and have learned to control my anger and express myself in a more respectful manner. The positive influence of my new school has also helped me develop better study habits and a stronger work ethic. I feel that my school has a more personalized environment. I know mostly everybody by name, something I would not have done in my previous large public schools.

At my old schools, I never had a best friend; I really was not close to anyone, and now I have a best friend named Edrees, to whom I am so close that I give him hugs, which is something I would have never done in my past schools. I have been bullied all my life, and no matter how much I switched schools, I kept getting bullied.

At my school now, I have so many friends that if I got bullied, they would stick up for me. The sense of community and support at my current school has made a huge difference in my life. I feel like I belong here and that I am valued as a person, which is something I never experienced before in my previous schools.

In conclusion, my non-public school has had a positive influence on me, and everyone should have a chance to experience the benefits of these types of schools. I urge you to support expanding vouchers to all students by passing House Bill 11.

Thank you.