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*President*

**HOUSE BILL 64 TESTIMONY OF  
LYMAN MILLARD  
FRIENDS OF BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOLS**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Driehaus, and members of the House Finance & Appropriations Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 64.

My name is Lyman Millard, an employee of Breakthrough Schools, a nonprofit community school operator that manages 10, soon to be 11, high performing community schools in Cleveland, many of which are sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Breakthrough Schools is the second highest performing network of public community schools in the State of Ohio.

Our network had a unique start, growing out of a collaborative effort by three existing independent community schools each with a distinct educational model. In 2009, they came together to improve their schools' long-term financial sustainability and to enable growth so that they could serve more children. Since that time, Breakthrough has grown rapidly - from 4 schools serving 1,100 students in 2011 to 10 schools serving nearly 3,000 students today. We have plans to grow to 20 schools by 2020 in hopes to serve about 7,000 students across Cleveland.

Our student population is 96% minority and 84% low-income who often arrive at our schools several grade levels behind in educational attainment. Yet for the 3rd year in a row, Breakthrough continues to rank among the highest rated charter networks in the state of Ohio. In 2012-2013, Breakthrough students, on average, outperformed their peers across the city, county, and state in every subject.

In addition to working for Breakthrough, and more importantly, I'm the father of a first grader and an incoming kindergartner at The Intergenerational School: one of ten schools in the Breakthrough network.

When my wife and I were choosing a school, we loved The Intergenerational School's innovative approach with only sixteen students in a multi-age classroom. But the facility -- an old merchant marine hospital -- left a lot to be desired. The teachers did their best to brighten the dreary walls, but many rooms didn't have windows and they didn't have a real gym or cafeteria. Through the generosity of local donors, The Intergenerational School is now in a beautifully renovated facility, but it is the exception in Cleveland, and one that is incredibly hard to replicate.

The reason it is hard to replicate is we rely on raising millions of dollars from generous donors in our community to bridge the funding gap we face every day. Most of the money raised goes to purchase, renovate and maintain old dilapidated buildings, like the one my children attend, so that they can receive the quality education they deserve.

You, members of the legislature, can help us bridge this gap by supporting the provision in HB 64 which creates a \$25 million building fund that can be accessed by schools sponsored by exemplary sponsors. The concept is much needed and we wholeheartedly support the idea of a building fund. However, the sponsor review process is still just a pilot and it could take a year or more for any sponsor to get any rating, and even longer to be rated exemplary. In addition, there are several sponsors who would not be rated exemplary yet they sponsor high performing community schools. The opposite holds true that a poor performing community school could receive building funds simply because it is sponsored by a sponsor rated exemplary. Neither of these scenarios would be a welcome result. Currently, 7 of our schools are sponsored by the Cleveland School district, which, today, since it is not yet rated “exemplary”, would prevent Breakthrough from receiving any of those funds.

We commend the Governor for including this building fund in HB 64 and strongly encourage the legislature to support it. We recommend however that the concept of exemplary sponsor be removed and replaced with a system that focuses on high performing community schools regardless of sponsor. We also suggest the inclusion of a public-private matching concept, whereby community schools that can raise dollars from their local communities can have those dollars matched by this building fund for purposes of acquiring or upgrading a school building. These changes would ensure that money in the building fund would be targeted to highly rated, community supported schools that could also generate savings for the state through providing community matching dollars.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.