



Thank you, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee members for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony today on Senate Bill 240.

My name is Chad Aldis, and I am the Vice President for Ohio Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The Fordham Institute is an education-focused nonprofit that conducts research, analysis, and policy advocacy with offices in Columbus, Dayton, and Washington, D.C. Our Dayton office, through the affiliated Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, is also a community school sponsor.

Fordham is a long-time advocate for community—better known as charter—schools. We believe they are an important educational option for parents trying to find the school that will help their children reach their full potential. But we’ve never advocated for choice simply for choice’s sake. We firmly support the principle that charter schools should both serve students well and protect and efficiently use taxpayer dollars.

With that principle in mind, I’m pleased to say that Fordham supports Substitute Senate Bill 240. As you’ve heard in compelling testimony from both Senator Peterson and charter school leaders, allowing for the merger of a group of charters into a network would allow charter schools to operate more efficiently. Specifically, it would make it easier to share staff between buildings, eliminate duplicative reporting requirements, reduce unnecessary meetings, and minimize administrative staff.

All schools should endeavor to operate with these efficiencies, but it’s critical for charter schools. Despite some recent increases in charter school funding, which this body deserves credit for, charters still receive twenty-five percent less taxpayer support per student than traditional public schools. By becoming more efficient and reducing administrative costs, charters will be able to direct more dollars where they belong—into the classroom.

While allowing for more efficiencies, the bill continues to ensure strong accountability measures for charter schools. Here are some of the key provisions that will protect both parents and taxpayers:

- At least half of the schools joining a network must meet the definition of a “community school of quality”. This rigorous definition of quality matches the language in HB 110 and relies on state report card measures.
- Each school that joins a network will continue to get a building report card, so parents will know how well the school is performing academically.
- Any school within a network that performs very poorly year after year remains subject to automatic closure.
- The bill will support continuity of education—critical for families—by giving students matriculating from one school in the network to another priority for admissions purposes.

- The network is required to have annual financial audits.
- Sponsors continue to provide oversight, must approve a school joining a network, and continue to be the approval body for any newly created schools that want to join a network.
- In the unlikely event that the network ceases operation, all remaining assets are distributed in accordance with current law.

Testimony last week raised a question as to whether the charter network would be subject to public meetings requirements. While the bill is a drafted in a manner suggesting that charter laws still apply—including open meetings requirements—if there is any doubt I'd recommend this committee add language to ensure that is the case.

In summary, Substitute SB 240 would create an environment making it easier for charter schools to operate more efficiently without sacrificing accountability. For those reasons, we are pleased to support this legislation.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.