



PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION of TEACHERS

TO: MEMBERS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FROM: JERRY T. JORDAN, PRESIDENT, PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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RE: **OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 97, PN 2187**

JULY 10, 2017

House Bill 97, presented as charter “reform,” simply fails to address in any substantive way the funding discrepancies that exist between charter, cyber charter, and public schools.

Instead, it establishes a new funding advisory commission that consists of solely political appointees to review charter funding mechanisms. Charter funding has been subject to a significant amount of research, both within our organization and in the broader education community. Subjecting Pennsylvania’s charter funding to additional review by a political committee is simply another means of kicking the can in the name of “reform.” [p.8-16]

Additionally, the adopted Senate amendment (A02449), further opens the door for decreased charter oversight and increased charter expansion.

- It removes language that would require charters to submit certified attendance records. [p.2]
- It removes language that would allow one year charter renewals when concerns exist regarding a school’s progress. [p.35]
- It removes provisions requiring charters to submit records of rental payments. [p.24]
- It allows another opening for charters to circumvent any enrollment caps or other discrepancies by using the charter appeal board to approve a renewal if the district does not act swiftly (which may be the case if there is a discrepancy between the charter operator and the district). [p.35-36]

The Senate amendment also strips away the language that would recalculate the funding of cyber charter schools. Estimated to save \$27 million/annually, this language would have addressed one small component of charter inequity. Instead, the bill has been amended to remove even that provision. [p.45-47]

House Bill 97 does not address issues of education quality in charter schools, or allow school districts to hold charters accountable if they fail to provide students with a quality education. The bill does not address cyber charter school quality; and it incorporates separate standards that will allow charter schools to play by different rules than district schools.

House Bill 97 does nothing to ensure that charters will equitably serve all students and does not address student “push out” in charters. It fails to ensure charters will equitably serve the most vulnerable students in their communities, including those who are experiencing homelessness, living in foster care, and returning from juvenile justice placement.

Further, House Bill 97:

- Increases likelihood that charters could receive 10 year renewals. [p.34 for brick and mortar; p.77 for cyber]
- Further stacks the deck in favor of charter schools by adding additional charter representatives to the charter appeal board. [p.37]
- Enables back door charter expansion by allowing schools to expand to more than one location. [p.39-40]
- Allows charters to accept applications electronically or via paper. That does not say that they have to accept both. If they require one or the other that may limit families. [p.42]
- Places burden on the school district when addressing funding discrepancy questions; and requires that they foot the bill until the issue is resolved. [p.49-50]
- Allows the yearly charter school audit to be conducted by auditors appointed by the board of that charter, clearly setting it up for a favorable analysis. [p.53-54]
- Fails to require parents of actively registered students to be the majority or even mandatory members of the charter board, selected by the democratic election of the parents of active students in the school.
- Fails to require that the charter, using public funds, publish their annual budgets on the same schedule and with the same safeguards as public school districts.
- Fails to provide a financing mechanism for the unfunded mandate imposed upon a local public school districts when the state board imposes a new or expanded charter on them and strands costs on the public school board in the process.
- Fails to address the ownership of real estate that is actually financed by the public school district tax revenues through rental payments to wholly controlled charter subsidiaries.
- Fails to assure transparency in procurement of goods and services by charters and the avoidance of ethical and actual conflicts of interest among

charter operators and among the families of charter operators, executive staff and board members despite being funded with taxpayer dollars.

- Fails to set equal standards for professional educator evaluation in comparison to public school district employed professional educators; and fails to require the evaluation of charter schools on a similar level playing field.
- Fails to impose meaningful penalties on charter operators and key staff for misappropriating or illegally using public funds that come into a charter's use or control.

For these reasons, and many more, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers is OPPOSED to House Bill 97 and urges Representatives to vote NO.

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