



## **H.R. 2218 – Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act**

**Background:** The federal government supports public charter schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) through the Charter Schools Program (CSP). Through the CSP, the Department of Education awards competitive grants to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) or charter school developers to provide financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools, and support the financing of charter school facilities. This support has been critical to the growth of public charter schools across the country, which provides additional education options for parents and students.

Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) introduced H.R.2218, the Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act, to streamline and modernize the Charter School Program to support the start-up, replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools; streamline program funding and administration at the federal and state levels; and promote choice, innovation, and excellence in education.

### **State Grants to Support the Development of Charter Schools**

The current Charter School Program provides funds for states to plan and start new charter schools, as well as disseminate information about existing charters in states with charter school laws. Grants are awarded to state educational agencies, which then award subgrants to charter school operators in the state. Since the program is outdated and not currently meeting the needs of the charter school community, the annual Labor/Health and Human Services/Education Appropriations Act includes language authorizing funds to support the replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools.

H.R. 2218 consolidates funding streams into the existing state grant program, allowing state educational agencies, state charter school boards, or governors to award subgrants to support new charter school start ups in addition to the replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools and new charter school models.

To receive funds under the program, grantees must describe how they will work with charter schools to instruct all prospective students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, and how they will provide technical assistance to ensure proper monitoring of authorizers and the charter schools in the state. The grant period is expanded from three years to five years to ensure enough time for planning and effective implementation.

## **Incentives to Support the Development and Expansion of Successful Charter Schools**

Under the leadership of Republican Governors, states are promoting education reform policies that increase access to high-quality charter schools. Indiana, North Carolina, Maine, Michigan, and other states are pushing laws to lift arbitrary caps on the growth of charter schools, which can stifle options for parents and students trapped in low-performing schools.

H.R. 2218 gives priority in accessing funding to those states that agree to repeal caps on the number or percentage of charter schools permitted or the number or percentage of students that may attend charter schools in the state. The bill also provides priority to states that: (1) allow more than a state educational agency or a local educational agency to be a charter school authorizer; (2) provide financing to charter schools that is comparable to traditional public schools; (3) support full-blended or hybrid-online charter school models; (4) use charter schools to help improve struggling schools.

### **Facilities Financing Assistance**

Public charter schools often have a difficult time securing financing to build or rehabilitate facilities. Unlike traditional public schools, public charter schools typically do not receive facilities funding and cannot raise funds through the imposition of local property taxes. Although some states have established per-pupil facilities aid funding to assist schools with their needs, many public charter schools are forced to use already limited operational funds to address facilities needs.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorizes two grant programs that provide financial assistance to charter schools: the Credit Enhancement Grant and Facilities Incentive Grant programs. The Credit Enhancement grant program provides funds to public and private non-profit entities to help charter schools secure private sector capital to buy, construct, renovate, or lease appropriate school facilities. The grant has been awarded to one national project in each of the past few years, due to the lack of funding. Facilities Incentive Grants help states establish or enhance and administer "per-pupil facilities aid" for charter schools. These grants have not been awarded since FY 2009.

H.R. 2218 consolidates both programs into the existing Charter School Program, allowing the Secretary of Education to compete a portion of the funds to State Educational Agencies or another eligible entity to support credit enhancement activities. If enough funds are available, the Secretary may award one or more grants to support charter school facilities activities.

### **National Activities**

Under current law, the Secretary of Education awards grants to individual charter schools in states that do not receive a grant under the state competition. H.R. 2218 would continue to provide authority to the Secretary to award funds directly to charter schools in states that did not win a quality charter school grant or did not compete in the competition to support the expansion and replication of high-quality charter schools, as well as new charter school models in these states as well. The bill would also support technical assistance to applicants and the dissemination of best practices of charter schools. The bill supports an evaluation of the program to measure its impact on charter schools.

## **Conclusion**

Across the country, charter schools are part of the solution to reform the nation's troubled public school system. H.R. 2218, the Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act provides additional educational options for parents and students by supporting the growth of public charter schools. By expanding the development and replication of high quality charter schools, H.R. 2218 empowers parents to play a more active role in their child's education, opens doors for teachers to pioneer fresh teaching methods, encourages state and local innovation, and helps students escape underperforming schools.