

Bill to amend the charter school program under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

April 7, 2014

Chairman John Kline
U.S. House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senior Democrat George Miller
U.S. House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Congressman Miller:

The group of non-profit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) represented in this letter operate more than 400 charter schools across 53 urban and rural communities and 23 states, serving more than 150,000 students. We are united by our commitment to improving academic and life outcomes for all students, particularly students in historically underserved communities. With high expectations for both students and adults, we believe that a child's ZIP code should not predict the quality of his or her education.

We are enthusiastic supporters of the provision in this bipartisan bill that supports charter schools in allowing for a feeder-school system that builds on student success over time. Beyond growing the number of students we serve, many public charter school operators are committed to providing comprehensive kindergarten through 12th grade educations to their students. By enrolling students as young as 4 or 5 years of age we can provide our students with the foundation needed to successfully launch into middle school and by staying with our students through their high school years we can better ensure that our students continue on a trajectory to be well prepared to enter college. It is the cornerstone of our mission to prepare our students to go to and through college and we are deeply appreciative of this change.

We are pleased that the proposed bill contains a provision for CMOs to compete directly for funding based on our success in serving educationally disadvantaged populations and our ability to produce strong academic achievement results. This much-needed language would codify the existing practice that has been in place since 2010. However, we are concerned about the percentage of funding that has been allocated for this high-impact investment and the impact this will have on our ability to grow to reach more students on our waitlists. To date, direct funds have seeded more than 330 new, high-quality charter schools in 20 states. In the next five years alone, our organizations aspire to open more than 370 new schools serving nearly 200,000 more students — and the 126,000 students on our schools' existing waiting lists have already expressed their interest in filling many of these seats.

As this bill moves to the floor, we hope additional consideration will be given to the overall authorization level of the Charter Schools Program, which is capped at \$300 million. While we recognize that the federal budget has been tight over the past several years, a higher authorization level would provide room for growth should the economy improve. Capping the Charter Schools Program funding level severely handicaps our ability to meet the demand by parents nation-wide to enroll their students in a public charter school. According to a survey conducted by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools in June of 2013, public charter school waitlists are approaching one million names nationally.

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This survey demonstrates that parental demand for public charter school seats continues to far outpace the supply.

We strongly believe that that the current *Charter Schools Program Grants for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Schools* is efficiently and effectively achieving its aim to replicate and expand high-quality charter school models based on demonstrated academic achievement results and success in serving educationally disadvantaged populations. To this end, we would be grateful if the bill would authorize funding consistent with the levels appropriated by Congress, and allow for this competition to grow enough to support us in opening 370 schools to reach an additional 200,000 students in the next five years. As currently drafted, this bill would provide \$18.6 million at the current appropriations level and just \$22.5 million at the maximum authorization level. Even under the best-case scenario, this funding level dwarfs what was appropriated in the FY 2014 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which ensured that no less than \$45 million would be targeted for this specific purpose.

Finally, we look forward to partnering with you to ensure clear guidance is offered to highlight Congressional intent that these grants funds should indeed be utilized in a flexible way to support strong school starts and meet the unique needs of each community. Flexibility is needed to allow federal Charter Schools Program funds to be spent not only on previously allowed expenses such as desks and books, but also on equally crucial items such as transportation (especially critical in rural areas), and improved programming for English language learners and special education students.

Thank you for taking up this important legislation, and for the important changes that this bill makes to the Charter Schools Program. We look forward to partnering with you to further refine this bill to modernize the Charter Schools Program as it moves forward in the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

Achievement First
Alliance College-Ready Public Schools
Aspire Public Schools
Breakthrough Schools
Brooke Charter Schools
Charter School Growth Fund
DSST Public Schools
Explore Schools
Gestalt Community Schools
Green Dot Public Schools
IDEA Public Schools
KIPP
LEARN Charter School Network
Mastery Charter Schools

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Noble Network of Charter Schools
Rocketship Education
STRIVE Preparatory Schools
Success Academy Charter Schools
Tindley Accelerated Schools
Uncommon Schools
Uplift Education
YES Prep Public Schools