

Testimony of Bill Phillips
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325 Blue Hills Avenue, Hartford, CT 06112
Testimony submitted to the Education Committee
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Chairpersons Stillman and Fleischmann, and respected members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Bill Phillips, president of the Northeast Charter Schools Network. We represent public charter schools here in Connecticut and New York.

I hope to get across two points with my testimony concerning the Governor's proposed changes to the Education Reform Law passed last year. First, I want to express our gratitude to the Governor and the General Assembly for their work last year to start the process of improving per-pupil funding for public charter schools. Specifically, we appreciate your commitment in the statute to increase charter funding to \$10,500-per-pupil last year, \$11,000 in 2014 fiscal year, and finally to \$11,500 in 2015. Second, I am here to respectfully ask that you not go backwards in your work to implement the law and that you return to the original implementation timeline as quickly as possible.

We understand the serious budget constraints the State is under given the current fiscal climate, and we accept the need to delay this year's full funding increase. Simply stated, when we see cuts in so many other areas of the budget, we are grateful for the \$300-per-student funding increase we receive in this proposed budget. While it's unquestionably good that this increase restores the cuts made during last December's deficit mitigation plan, please remember that it also means that we haven't moved past the initial funding commitment in the reform law.

Because charter schools remain at a significant per-pupil funding disadvantage when compared to their host districts, it's critical that we move back to the timeline for implementing the reform law as quickly as possible. Accordingly for the 2015 fiscal year, we urge the General Assembly to keep the original commitment of the reform law and fund charter schools at \$11,500-per-student. If you are willing go back to the original funding timeline in 2015 fiscal year, you will put charter funding closer to the proposed ECS foundation amount of \$11,754 per student.

Speaking again of proposed changes to the statute, I want to bring to the Committee's attention what I hope is an unintended consequence of the Governor's budget proposal. While I believe that the proposal attempts to

delay implementation of the reform law by one year, the language is written in such a way that it actually eliminates the commitment to fund charters at \$11,500. Said another way, the current proposal removes the commitment to the third and final increase that charters were promised in last year's law. Again, we hope you will consider returning to the original intent and timeframe of the law you passed last year, and fund charters by \$11,500 per student in 2015.

To summarize, we understand that the Governor and the Legislature cannot fix funding gap between charters and district schools in one fell swoop. However, you will hear today from several school administrators and public charter school parents that good things happened for kids with last year's increases, and that there are real consequences to those same students when we pull back from and/or delay implementation of the reform law. We hope the legislature will appreciate that we are trying to find a fair middle ground. We accept the need to forgo the \$11,000 amount that was promised charters for the 2014 fiscal year. We also hope the legislature can understand our urgency to recommit to the reform law's original timeline by funding charters at \$11,500 for the 2015 fiscal year.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, and thank you for your time.