



Achievement **First**

Testimony of Lenny H. Speiller

Achievement First - Vice President, Communications & External Relations
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Good afternoon Chair Fleischmann, Chair Slossberg and members of the Education Committee. My name is Lenny Speiller and I am the vice president of communications and external relations for Achievement First. Achievement First is a 501(c)3 nonprofit network of public charter schools, based right here in Connecticut, serving families in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.

I come before you today to voice Achievement First's support for Governor Malloy's Bill No. 943 to modernize and reform Connecticut's twenty year old charter law. The governor's bill calls for an increased focus on student learning and academic performance, increased accountability and increased collaboration between district and charter public schools. These measures are welcomed by Achievement First schools and many are already in place and practiced by our network.

First, like all schools, our primary focus is on student learning. This animates and drives all that we do. While there is always more work to be done, we're very proud of the results that our students have achieved with the support and guidance of their teachers, principals and parents. The legislation would rightly require academic and organizational performance goals and consideration for the issuance of any new charter or charter renewal, and also require charter schools to submit annual reports that demonstrate each school's progress towards those goals.

Second, this legislation outlines additional guidelines and oversight for charter management organizations, or CMOs, like Achievement First. Just as a district office supports its local schools, a CMO supports its schools as well. The governor's bill establishes further transparency and clarity on how CMOs and charter schools should work together, including academic, contractual and fiduciary components of that relationship. The bill would also strengthen training, best practices, and conflict-of-interest requirements for charter school boards, all protocols that Achievement First already has in place. At the end of the day, only high-quality CMOs should be given the privilege to serve Connecticut students and schools. This legislation would help ensure that happens.

Finally, we appreciate the Governor's efforts to increase collaboration and dialogue between traditional public schools and public charter schools. As a former teacher, I can't tell you how valuable it was for me to be able to go to a colleague or more veteran teacher for advice, counsel and support.

However, we believe this provision of the bill can and should be a two-way street. Just as charter schools would be required to share best practices for student learning with their local board of education, the local board should share best practices with charter schools as well. We at Achievement First would be the first to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers and there is

403 James Street
New Haven, CT 06513
203 773 3223



335 Adams Street, Suite 700
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718 623 2660



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much we can learn from other schools and the many great educators doing amazing work with their students across this state. Our principal residency and training program, where district and charter school principals serve, learn and work alongside each other, is a great example of such a partnership.

While there is certainly more than can be done to make Connecticut a place where more high-quality public charter schools are available to more families, this bill is a welcomed step in the right direction.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. With that, I am happy to address any questions that you may have.

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