



Our Piece of the Pie.
*Helping urban youth become
economically independent adults*

**Testimony - Education Committee
Senate Bill 1096
Wednesday, March 18, 2015**

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Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg, Ranking Senate Member Boucher, Ranking House Member Lavielle and other esteemed members of the Legislature’s Education Committee, thank you for accepting my testimony today regarding Senate Bill 1096, An Act Concerning Charter Schools.

My name is Bob Rath and I am President and CEO of Our Piece of the Pie. We are a 40-year-old non-profit Hartford-based youth services organization that has had a profound impact on the lives of thousands of young men and women from urban communities throughout Connecticut. We are also involved in leading high schools for over-aged and under-credited youth in three areas in Connecticut, working in conjunction with each of those municipalities. Through innovative strategies, we *are* engaging these students -- helping more than 200 former or near-dropouts graduate in the last five years alone. I submit this testimony today in opposition of Senate Bill 1096.

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Overwhelmingly, charter schools in Connecticut have proven themselves to be models of effectiveness and efficiency, and remain an invaluable part of our educational system. The overwhelming majority of charter schools respect transparency, effective governance structures and strict adherence to anti-Conflict of Interest policies, and are adamant about putting the needs of the children we serve first and foremost.

Our Piece of the Pie respects existing state law which closely regulates not-for-profit organizations such as our schools. This existing law makes non-profits and our schools subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) based on four determining factors: if the entity performs a government function; the level of government funding that entity receives; the extent of government involvement or regulation; and whether the entity was created by the government. Non-profits have existed under such close scrutiny for years and support the regulations as they currently exist.

Senate Bill 1096 would unfortunately and unfairly bypass this well-established criteria process and add additional and unnecessary regulatory burden to non-profits throughout Connecticut. These new burdens constitute an unfair singling out of Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and the schools they govern, and would have a negative impact in terms of shifting the focus from serving students to compliance with excessively burdensome and unneeded new regulations. This is why I and many of my colleagues throughout Connecticut oppose this bill.

Our Piece of the Pie is proud of the work being done throughout Connecticut at so many fine charter schools, schools which often work with vulnerable populations of students and consistently have a positive impact on their lives. Please don’t inhibit the effectiveness of charter schools, which serve Connecticut’s students so well, with this unnecessary legislation.

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