

June 3, 2019

PA Senate Education Committee

RE: SB 590 (Browne)

Dear Senator,

On behalf of our 4,500 locally elected school directors, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) is respectfully **requesting your support of Senate Bill 590 (Browne),** which establishes the Charter School Funding Advisory Commission.  This legislation is scheduled for committee consideration on Tuesday, June 4 at 10:00am.

Pennsylvania’s more than twenty-year-old charter school law has long been in desperate need of reform.  Enhanced accountability, transparency, greater parity between charter schools and school districts, and funding reform are some of the most significant issues being discussed.  However, of all these issues, the matter of charter school funding has become one of the most pressing concerns for school districts as charter school payments continue to place as one of the largest and fastest growing cost drivers in school district budgets.

From 2010-11 to 2016-17 data shows charter school costs for school districts growing by 72.4%, making the growth in these mandated costs second only to the growth in mandated pension costs.  While school districts have responded by reducing salary costs and outsourcing educational and other services to help control spending, the rapid growth of charter school costs has resulted in hard decisions.  Many school districts have been forced to increase property taxes and reduce educational programs and other opportunities for students in order to balance budgets.

Building on the successes of other funding commissions, such as the Basic Education Funding Commission, Senate Bill 590 seeks to respond to the critical need for charter school funding reform by establishing a bicameral, bipartisan legislative commission.  The commission would hold public hearings, examine current laws and regulations, consult with all stakeholders, review laws from other states, assess the actual cost of educating a child in a charter school, regional charter school, and cyber charter school, and evaluate and make recommendations regarding appropriate funding in a report due to the Legislature within 18 months.

PSBA firmly believes that any meaningful charter school law reform must include measures which address charter school funding, and we thank Senator Browne for his leadership and thoughtfulness in introducing Senate Bill 590.  PSBA appreciates your attention and consideration of this important issue.  If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

John M. Callahan

Chief Advocacy Officer