



June 5, 2021

Members of the Senate Education Committee
Senate of Pennsylvania

Re: Senate Bill 1

Dear Senator:

After careful review and on behalf of our 4,500 publicly elected members, **we are writing to express opposition to Senate Bill 1** as it removes local control from the charter school authorizing process, does not address the critical need for charter funding reform, and creates an automatic escalator to the Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program which will shift precious resources away from the majority of students in the Commonwealth.

Since the passage of the original Pennsylvania charter school law in 1997, traditional public school leaders across the state have been alarmed by the lack of accountability and transparency required by the law as well as the significantly flawed charter school funding formulas which result in inconsistencies and overpayments to charter schools. While Senate Bill 1 does well in addressing some of the widely acknowledged transparency and accountability concerns in the law, it creates a new statewide authorizing commission which would allow charter school operators and applicants to circumvent local taxpayer oversight and control and diminish accountability and responsiveness to the local communities the school is intended to serve. The bottom line is that as long as local taxpayer dollars are being used to fund charter schools, local control and oversight is essential. The statewide authorizer proposed in SB 1 undermines Pennsylvania's long-standing tradition of local control and is a concept our members oppose. Creating a competing system for charter authorization would allow charter schools to shop for the authorizer with the lowest standards and least amount of oversight which does nothing but silence the voice of the school district and taxpayers footing the ever-increasing bill to what is certain to be a politically influenced authorizing commission.

The growth of charter school enrollment over the years has only served to exacerbate the flaws in the current system for funding charter schools. Because of these flaws, charter school costs for school districts have grown at an accelerated pace which far exceeds the growth of enrollment in charter schools. This skewed funding system has resulted in charter school tuition costs being rated as the top budget pressure facing school districts. The cost of this mandate forces school boards to raise local property taxes and/or cut programs and opportunities for students in district schools in

order to afford the ever-growing tuition payments to charter schools. Without addressing the priority of charter school funding reform, including an efficient and fair reconciliation process, Senate Bill 1 misses the mark of achieving substantial and dynamic reform.

PSBA also has concerns with the provisions in SB 1 related to the unprecedented expansion of the EITC and OSTC programs. If the goal of the EITC and OSTC programs is to help students in struggling schools, expanding the program would shift much-needed resources away from schools that need it the most, which the majority of Pennsylvania parents do not support. In a recent statewide survey, parents were asked how to best help students in struggling schools, 63% of parents said that they supported providing additional resources and supports to the struggling schools.

Traditional public schools that educate roughly 90% of the children in Pennsylvania continue to fight for 2 to 3% increases in state education funding every year, despite Pennsylvania ranking near the bottom (44th out of 50 states) in terms of the state's share of education revenue. Comparatively, Senate Bill 1 would take programs that currently costs \$185 million (EITC) and \$55 million (OSTC) this year and grow them to a combined \$1 billion in five years, \$3 billion in 10 years and \$8.5 billion in 15 years. At a time when the state's economy is only just starting to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Independent Fiscal Office projecting multi-billion-dollar state revenue deficits over the next several years, PSBA has concerns with such a drastic increase when difficult state budgets as well as increasingly restrictive school district budgets lie ahead in the forceable future.

Given these significant issues, PSBA is opposed to Senate Bill 1 as written and hope to work with the Chairman as well as the Committee to develop legislation that preserves taxpayer local control and addresses charter reform in a comprehensive manner. Recently, PSBA created a Charter School Task Force to study and make recommendations for meaningful charter school reform. The Task Force outlined eight specific recommendations for reforming the 24-year old law which can be found in the Task Force's [Report](#).

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.