

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE  
EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
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Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am delighted and encouraged that deliberations have begun on discussing a new charter school bill that will revitalize the state of education in Maryland. Currently, thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have embraced charter schools as a means to improve education; perhaps Maryland will lead the remaining 11 states into this new era of education reform.

Over the last four years, we have been contacted often by educators, parents and citizen groups in this state about their interest in helping to bring about charter schools. Many of those parents and educators now belong to the Maryland Charter School Network, and others stand ready to communicate to you their deep desire to help found schools that are better tailored to the needs of their children.

Before I explain the reasons and research behind my support for charter schools in Maryland, let me provide you some brief information about my organization.

The Center for Education Reform (CER) is a national voice for more choices in education and more rigor in education programs, both of which are key to more effective schooling. It delivers practical, research-based information and assistance to engage a diverse lay audience—including parents, policymakers, and education reform groups—in taking actions to ensure that US schools are delivering a high quality education for all children in grades K-12.

In addition to leading CER, I am a 20 year resident of the state of Maryland and reside with my husband and four children in Montgomery County. Despite the respective higher quality of our County's schools, there is not a week that goes by where there is not a discussion with friends and community about the need for dramatic improvements in the content, approach and methods of teaching that we offer our children in most public schools and yes, even in some private schools.

But having spent a considerable amount of time in Baltimore City and Kent County, for example, I share the concern of lawmakers here that we are not doing enough fast enough to reach all the children whose growing and diverse needs are a constant challenge to our public school system.

Indeed across the state, it has become increasingly clear that Maryland is not different than most states in its need to dramatically improve and increase the learning opportunities we offer our families and children.

Having led one of the nation's premier education reform and research organizations for the last ten years, we now have an enormous storehouse of information to draw from to help determine what works best for children. In fact, the

information produced by the Center for Education Reform is used objectively from institutions such as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Council of State Legislatures, the Education Commission of the States, and dozens of research universities, laboratories and schools. The information and observations we have collected and analyzed, working in tandem with many of the above-named institutions, are the basis for the following information.

Charter schools are an innovative way to increase family and community involvement in a child's education. When created under a good law, charter schools will deliver programs that are tailored to educational excellence and community needs. Because they are schools of choice, they are held to the highest level of accountability – consumer demand. It is our hope that the bill that comes out of committee will not only enable charter schools to provide excellent educational opportunities for all children, but to exceed the highest expectations as well.

In order to create a viable charter law, a few things need to be considered.

- It's imperative that the legislation allows multiple chartering authorities, which will produce genuinely autonomous charter schools.
- The creation of a binding appeals process is fundamental to ensuring the development and growth of quality charter schools in Maine.
- It is also very important to creative incentives for charter schools to thrive throughout the state, by requiring equitable and timely funding, especially as it relates to facilities assistance.

We would like to offer our hand in helping you navigate the often contentious battleground of reforming schools in your state. It is our aim to work with those who want to make a difference in children's education, regardless of the vested interests at stake.

Enclosed are some materials that may shed some light on how charter schools are fulfilling the educational needs of children and parents. They can make a huge difference here, but only if they are given the chance to thrive by a legislature that cares deeply about education. If we can be of assistance in any other way, please do not hesitate to call our External Affairs Director, Anna Varghese at (202) 822-9000 or via email at [anna@edreform.com](mailto:anna@edreform.com).

Best Regards,

Jeanne Allen  
President