



KIMBERLY A. WILLIAMS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
19th District

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE OF DELAWARE
411 LEGISLATIVE AVENUE
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

COMMITTEES
Education, Chair
Labor, Vice-Chair
Appropriations
Housing & Community Affairs
Joint Finance
Manufactured Housing
Revenue & Finance

House Education Committee Meeting Minutes

03.23.22

This committee meeting has been recorded and may be accessed via legis.delaware.gov

Chair Williams called the meeting to order at 3:07 p.m. Members included Vice Chair Chukwuocha, and Reps. Matthews, Heffernan, Kowalko, Morrison, Osienki, Bush, Moore, Briggs King, Lynn, Collins, Postles, Ramone, Shupe, and Smith. Also present were Reps. Dorsey Walker and Wilson-Anton. Secretary Mark Holodick from the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) and Controller General Ruth Ann Jones were also in attendance. For a list of public comment, please see the speaker list below.

Chair Williams introduced **HB 318, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO LICENSES FOR DEPLOYED ACTIVE DUTY, ACTIVATED RESERVE, AND NATIONAL GUARD MILITARY PERSONNEL**. With permission from the Chair, Rep. Dorsey Walker, prime sponsor of the bill, introduced HB 318.

Rep. Dorsey Walker stated that the purpose of the bill is to allow educators who are spouses of active-duty military members deployed to the Dover Airforce Base, to begin work upon completion of a background check. She added that this bill may help address teacher shortages in Delaware.

With permission from the Chair, Rep. Dorsey Walker introduced expert witnesses Rob Gray, education associate with the DDOE, and Emily Cunningham, Chief of Staff with the DDOE, to answer questions from the committee.

Rep. Briggs King asked if military educator spouses will have to pass the State Bureau of Investigation procedure.

Rep. Dorsey Walker clarified that they must pass a background check first before entering the classroom.

Rep. Heffernan expressed her support for the bill.

Chair Williams opened the committee to public comment.

Robert Overmiller stated his support of the bill.

A motion was made by Rep. Bush and seconded by Rep. Moore to release HB 318 from committee; the motion carried. Yes= 14 (Williams, Matthews, Heffernan, Kowalko, Morrison, Osienski, Bush, Moore, Briggs King, Collins, Postles, Ramone, Shupe, Smith): No= 0; Absent= 4 (Chukwuocha, Bolden, Lynn, Hensley). The bill was released from committee with a F=5, M=10, U=0 vote.

Chair Williams introduced **HB 315, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 14 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO FREE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**. With permission from the Chair, Rep. Heffernan, prime sponsor of the bill, introduced HB 315.

Rep. Heffernan explained that HB 315 helps solve the substitute teacher shortage in Delaware public schools. The bill provides funding for high schools, middle schools, and high-need elementary schools to hire up to two permanent full-time substitute teachers. Substitute teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree but do not have to be a certified teacher. Rep. Heffernan stated that substitute teacher shortages are affecting two-thirds of schools in the State, impacting educators as burnout increases. Delaware has few benefits and low per diem rates for substitute teachers causing difficulties in filling positions. Furthermore, teachers and administrative staff are forced to fill in the role of substitute teacher positions. Rep. Heffernan explained that if this bill is released from committee, it will be referred to the House Appropriations committee, where funding will be discussed. The bill states that if a school has 30 educators, one full-time substitute teacher can be hired, and if the school has 55 educators, two full-time substitute teachers will be allotted. If a school meets 65 percent of both thresholds, then the district can also secure additional funding for a district-wide full-time substitute. Rep. Heffernan emphasized the importance of substitutes receiving professional development training as it will help with increasing teacher retention rates, creating better student-teacher relationships. The bill is supported by the Delaware School Counselor Association and teachers' union. The DDOE holds a neutral position on this bill.

Rep. Heffernan introduced representatives from the Delaware Association of School Administrators (DASA), and several superintendents to present as expert witnesses.

Rep. Smith agreed with the needs and solution purposed by the bill but had two concerns. Rep. Smith stated that there may not be enough funding for the bill. He pointed out that, according to the fiscal note, a school district can elect to take a cap option of 30 percent of the units earned at \$35,000 a unit. Rep. Smith is concerned that schools could use the money for something other than substitute teachers.

Rep. Heffernan called on Jill Flory, Chief Financial Officer of the Red Clay School District, to respond to Rep. Smith.

Jill Flory stated that many schools in Delaware contract out for substitute teacher services. The

cash-out option in this bill would allow for a contractual option if the district were unable to fill a position. She added that Red Clay School District's substitutes are currently procured through a vendor.

Rep. Smith asked about the local funds portion of the bill.

Ms. Flory stated that the funding portion would not be a problem as substitute teachers would be prioritized above anything else.

Rep. Briggs King, an additional sponsor on the bill, stated that her constituents were supportive of the bill. She explained that her understanding was that individual school districts could use funding as they see fit, including other initiatives such as libraries.

Ms. Flory said that Rep. Briggs King's understanding is correct, but typically, an allocation is used for its intended purpose.

Rep. Briggs King said that she discussed this type of funding with her constituency last year and wants to remain consistent about how allocated funds can be used.

Rep. Moore expressed her appreciation of this bill as an educator who relies on substitutes to fill her classroom. She asked if there was an opportunity to create a pipeline for teacher retention, as certification can be prohibitively expensive.

Chair Williams asked Dr. Tammy Croce, Executive Director of DASA, to respond to Rep. Moore.

Dr. Croce stated that the hope is for new substitutes to gain interest in becoming educators and for DASA to help move them to appropriate areas. While there have been conversations regarding this topic, the objective of this bill is not to solve that problem specifically. However, there are critical needs scholarships and many school districts have opportunities for tuition reimbursement after a substitute teacher works for a certain period.

Rep. Heffernan clarified that through critical needs scholarships an educator can work with the district to help pay for education, an opportunity her own daughter has used.

Rep. Moore clarified that a teacher must already be certified to qualify for critical need scholarships.

Chair Williams opened the committee floor to public comment.

Dr. Tammy Croce, Executive Director of DASA, expressed support for the bill. In the last ten years, there has been a 61 percent decrease in ed-prep program enrollment and a 65 percent

decrease in ed-prep program completion. These decreases have caused a national teacher and substitute teacher shortage which Delaware has been heavily impacted by. Dr. Croce stated that while there is no single solution to this problem, innovation is needed, and this bill provides opportunity for substitute teacher recruitment and retention.

Kristin Dwyer, Director of Legislation for the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA), expressed support for the bill. She agreed with Dr. Croce's statements and was appreciative of the opportunity to work with Rep. Heffernan on the bill. DSEA's top priority for the year is to tackle operational issues that are causing teacher burnout and impact student learning. Ms. Dwyer addressed Rep. Briggs King and directed her to line 19 of the bill which states that funds must be used for substitute teaching or reducing class size.

Jill Flory, Chief Financial Officer of Red Clay School District, thanked the committee for their support. Ms. Flory indicated the bill helps to alleviate the stress of staffing buildings due to absences and uncovered positions. Ms. Flory emphasized the importance of creating continuity for students by having substitutes who are part of the district.

Robert Overmiller stated support for the bill.

A motion was made by Rep. Kowalko and seconded by Rep. Osienski to release HB 315 from committee; the motion carried. Yes= 15 (Williams, Matthews, Heffernan, Kowalko, Lynn, Morrison, Osienski, Bush, Moore, Briggs King, Collins, Postles, Ramone, Shupe, Smith): No= 0; Absent=3 (Chukwuocha, Bolden, Hensley). The bill was released from committee with a F=7, M=8, U=0 vote.

Chair Williams introduced **HB 353, AN ACT TO AMEND THE LAWS OF DELAWARE RELATING TO CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NEW CASTLE COUNTY**. With permission from the Chair, Rep. Wilson-Anton, sponsor of the bill, introduced HB 353. Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that this bill reflects the concerns of her community members as the Christiana School District voted to impose a moratorium on charter schools. Rep. Wilson-Anton is joined by community members, school board members, superintendent of the Christiana School District, local NAACP chapters, and other advocacy groups. She noted that the committee members have two letters of support, as well as many emails from charter school proponents.

Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that Delaware charter schools can offer exceptional education, but several charter schools have failed in their mission. Rep. Wilson-Anton mentioned instances of charter schools closing during the middle of the school year and the recurring concern of charter schools shifting resources from public schools. The Governor recently announced the Wilmington Learning Collaborative to address equity concerns around charter and public schools. Rep. Wilson-Anton believes the state needs to examine the way charter applications and modifications are granted in New Castle County. This bill aims to implement a moratorium on

charter applications while the New Castle County Charter School Reform Advisory Group (Advisory Group) researches and produces recommendations for the General Assembly. The General Assembly may then take these recommendations to make modifications to charter school law in the allotted time of the moratorium. Rep. Wilson-Anton explained that this bill is not anti-charter nor is she personally as a graduate of the Charter School of Wilmington. She clarified that the bill will not affect any existing charter schools or push oversight over charter schools. This bill focuses on future charter schools and how current procedures may be modified. Rep. Wilson-Anton expressed her want for all students to have equal access to charter schools and for the Delaware school system to be equitable and fair.

Rep. Wilson-Anton reiterated that this bill pauses the granting of new school charters in New Castle County until Jan 1, 2024, and creates the Advisory Group to overview the charter school process, improve equity, engage charter schools with the community, and recommend improvements for decisions on future charter applications. Rep. Wilson-Anton noted the concerns about three charter schools currently in the process of submitting a charter application and is open to amendment so that these schools are not penalized. She mentioned two previous court cases where community members successfully sued the State of Delaware because of lack of quality and equitable education. Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that these issue were a few of the reasons she ran for office and that it is the responsibility of the General Assembly to address.

Rep. Kowalko apologized for falsehoods directed towards Rep. Wilson-Anton's efforts to reform future charter school applications. He knows that there are many parents and students gathered for the committee meeting today and that some have received misinformation regarding the bill. He has seen hateful emails towards both public schools and charter schools during this process. Rep. Kowalko does not feel that the House Education Committee is infringing on choice and disagrees with claims that the committee labeled charter schools as racist. He believes those labels hinder legitimate reform discussion, and thanked Rep. Wilson-Anton for bringing this bill forward.

Rep. Morrison thanked Rep. Wilson-Anton for the bill. As a former educator, Rep. Morrison said he believes this bill allows for a necessary pause and reflect period in order to make the school system better for both public and charter schools. He added that there has been inflammatory rhetoric and misinformation around this bill, but it is an opportunity to help all students receive a quality education.

Rep. Smith appreciates the bills efforts but believes it is not necessary. He stated that the Advisory Group is very similar to the already-existing Redding Consortium and believes there would be too much overlap. Rep. Smith explained that the same discussions around schools in Delaware have been happening for decades and called on the Governor to help divide the school districts to help solve the problem. Rep. Smith believes the New Castle County schools should be consolidated as many Wilmington students are being bussed into Newark. Existing

infrastructure needs to be addressed first, and as a local-control state, Delaware needs to view this issue in a holistic sense. Rep. Smith opposed the bill, but he is willing to work on similar legislation that effects the existing infrastructure.

Rep. Wilson-Anton responded that she would be willing to compromise the Advisory Group if representatives feel it is not needed. However, the Redding Consortium is not tasked with answering certain questions placed on the Advisory Group. Rep. Wilson-Anton explained that a moratorium cannot be put in place based on the work of the Redding Consortium. In addition, the bill is a local control bill and comes from request of the Christiana School Board as it is unable to approve charter schools in its district lines. Rep. Wilson-Anton opposed this concept as the Red Clay Consolidated School District can approve charter schools within its lines. Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that she does not want to change anything that is currently part of the landscape but wants to allow for local control in the future. She compromised that if the Advisory Group were to be removed, there would need to be a deadline for the Redding Consortium. She is also open to suggestions about the makeup of the Advisory Group board.

Chair Williams called for a two-minute recess.

Chair Williams reconvened the committee meeting.

Rep. Smith asked why the bill is only for New Castle County and not for the entire state. He added that the bill should be looking at impact and not just the charter school application process.

Rep. Wilson-Anton said that impact cannot solely be discussed as it is broad.

Rep. Smith asked if this bill was solely created due to new charter schools in Newark.

Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that she wanted to give additional context as she only had five minutes to introduce the bill. When she was first elected, she attended a September 2020 meeting of Friends of Christiana where they discussed charter schools. This bill has been in the works for a long time and there are several charter schools in the Christiana area that have showcased the need for this bill. Rep. Wilson-Anton is open to expanding the scope of the bill to be statewide. She reiterated that she does not want to penalize anyone currently in the process of a charter school application. Rep. Wilson-Anton is open to amendments but did not want to make changes without first discussing the bill in committee.

Rep. Wilson-Anton called on expert witness Kim Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations for DDOE.

Kim Klein agreed that language could be changed to specify that the bill would not affect charter schools currently in the application process.

Rep. Wilson-Anton said that she is open to making that change depending on the opinion of the committee.

Rep. Smith believes a strategic plan is needed for public and charter schools in the state. He stated that these discussions pit together public schools and charter schools which are both publicly funded. Rep. Smith emphasized that he does not want another advisory group with the same people on it.

Rep. Briggs King asked why the bill does not cite specific parts of the Delaware Code being modified.

Rep. Wilson-Anton responded that since the work of the Advisory Group will be over by the time the Code is updated it will go into the laws of Delaware instead.

Chair Williams asked House Majority Caucus Attorney, Jeff Porter to elaborate.

House Attorney Porter stated that because of the limited scope and duration of the bill, it was decided that an amendment to the laws of Delaware would be suitable.

Rep. Briggs King stated that there is a charter approval procedure in the Delaware Code and asked how this differed from the duties of the Advisory Group.

Chair Williams asked Legislative Attorney Deborah Gottschalk from the Delaware Division of Research to answer Rep. Briggs King's question.

Ms. Gottschalk explained that law related to task forces and their enactment language are law in the same way as if it was in the Delaware Code. For short-term advisory groups that accompany a statute, they will be put into the laws of Delaware rather than the Delaware Code since the advisory groups will be completed by the time the Code is updated.

Rep. Briggs King stated her worry about a slippery slope. She explained that even though this bill addresses New Castle County, her district has charter schools which were created to address specific needs. Rep. Briggs King emphasized that parents want what is best for their children and make decisions about where to live based on this. Rep. Briggs-King pointed out lines 10 to 21 of the bill, which states that the Advisory Group only contains two members from charter schools. She believes there needs to be a better balance so that charter schools are not consistently outvoted. Rep. Briggs King noted a program she hosts for young women for exemplary academic performance, many of whom come from New Castle County and attend charter schools. Rep. Briggs King stated that she does not want to disrupt these charter schools and believes there is a need for redistricting. Wilmington needs its own high school, and the Legislature is falling short of creating real solutions because there is no political will to do so. Rep. Briggs King appreciates the attempt made by the bill but does not agree that this will create solutions.

Rep. Moore asked about the current charter school approval process and if school districts can weigh in on approvals.

Ms. Klein explained that school districts around the charter school's area are allowed to submit an impact statement.

Rep. Moore asked if there are opportunities to expand this to all counties for fairness. She also clarified that this bill is a pause on charter applications and would like to see an amendment stating that there will be no impact to the charter schools currently in the process of applying.

Rep. Heffernan stated that she appreciates the consideration for charter schools in the process of applying. Rep. Heffernan has read comments from people believing that Rep. Wilson-Anton opposes charter schools, a statement she deems untrue.

Rep. Shupe addressed comments made by Rep. Kowalko about charter schools and racism. In a previous meeting, it was stated by a representative that certain selection criteria used by charter schools were racist. He believes that certain representatives to be held accountable. Rep. Shupe agreed that a review board is needed to look at the criteria of charter schools, but he cannot speak to the other groups currently active on this issue. Rep. Shupe agrees with Rep. Briggs King that there needs to be more representation from charter schools on the Advisory Group and does not believe a moratorium on charter school applications is necessary. Rep. Shupe wants to make sure there is equity in access to charter schools but believes these issues can be discussed while charter schools are still allowed to submit applications and expand.

Rep. Ramone emphasized his concern with Delaware's large continuous school districts and the complexity of the charter school environment. Rep. Ramone agreed with Rep. Smith about the Advisory Group not being necessary as the Redding Consortium already exists. He reiterated the want for parents to have a choice in their children's quality education. Rep. Ramone stated that discussion held in the committee warrants an opportunity to table the bill to make modifications.

Rep. Matthews stated that he received many emails regarding this bill and agreed that at certain times the school system in the State does not work. He explained that the Delaware school system creates an environment where schools fight for resources. While Delaware may have some excellent charter schools there are some that are unrepresentative of the surrounding population. Rep. Matthews stated that public schools should represent their area. He admonished the school funding system and the illusion of choice in Delaware.

Rep. Morrison does not believe that current taskforces take care of this issue. He stated his support for the legislation and wants to allow for a special body to study the issue.

Rep. Collins stated that the Advisory Group will not have enough time to complete their work as allotted by the bill. He added that this bill does not give the Advisory Group guidance on how to create recommendations for the General Assembly.

Rep. Wilson-Anton disagreed with Rep. Collins as the bill mentions specific questions the Advisory Group is required to answer. She agreed that if the bill was expanded to statewide that membership of the Group may be expanded. However, she noted the difficulty of getting large taskforces to come to a consensus and to have a quorum. Rep. Wilson-Anton is open to discussion around membership seats on the Advisory Group but wants to keep the Group at its current number. She added that the timeline was not an issue.

Rep. Collins stated that the General Assembly has routinely granted extensions for taskforces at their request. He believes that the time constraints listed in the bill are not sufficient and worries that recommendations will be made hastily.

Rep. Wilson-Anton disagreed as the duties of the Advisory Group are narrow. She offered to speak with Rep. Collins on this issue later.

Rep. Ramone harked back to the previous conversation because he is not against the efforts of Rep. Wilson-Anton. He does not believe that the time it will take for this bill to be signed into law is necessary and wants to help expedite results through an already existing forum.

Rep. Wilson-Anton assured Rep. Ramone that this was not a worry. She believes that this bill should be handled quick in the timeframe that is written.

Rep. Kowalko clarified that this bill only creates an Advisory Group, not a group that mandates policy.

Rep. Wilson-Anton agreed with Rep Kowalko. She stated that legislation could have been introduced to target how charter schools are approved but did not believe that this was the best method. She reiterated her belief in the timeline which allows several parties to come to the table on this issue. Rep. Wilson-Anton added that if this bill leaves committee, that she would be amendable to adding a charter school parent the Advisory Group.

Rep. Shupe voiced concern for how the bill would affect current charter schools seeking approval and asked for Rep. Wilson-Anton to explain why a moratorium is necessary.

Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that the current landscape is getting ready for several charter school projects to begin. The moratorium is necessary as the charter school environment cannot be accessed if it is constantly changing. As the idea of the moratorium was given to Rep. Wilson-Anton by her community, she will not be removing this from the bill. She stated that she will be changing the enactment date of the moratorium so that the three schools currently seeking charters are not.

Rep. Shupe asked how a moratorium on charter schools would help the Advisory Group as the school landscape is an everchanging system.

Rep. Wilson-Anton stated that the Advisory Group will meet to figure out the landscape of Charter schools and make recommendations for it after the moratorium is lifted.

Rep. Shupe continued to disagree with the need for the moratorium and alluded to the need of a complete analysis of the public school system.

Rep. Moore expressed support for the bill as there is a need for continued research and conversation in the General Assembly about how the landscape of the education system is in Delaware. She added that education legislation should not be based on party lines, but the needs of students and she supports the addition of parents to the Advisory group.

Rep. Smith stated that the problem of charter schools is not based on party lines but geographical ones. He added that several groups in attendance are not worried about students but their district lines.

Rep. Moore did not disagree with Rep. Smith but believes the bill should go to the house floor so a larger discussion may be held.

Rep. Lynn calls for an end to conversation by the committee so public comment may proceed.

Rep. Osienki stated his support for the legislation. He referenced his experience on the Bond Committee and how the charter school law has not been changed since 1996. This bill allows for recommendations to be created on the charter school system and subsequent requested funding.

Rep. Ramone called for a point of order. Chair Williams previously stated that the meeting would conclude at 5:00 p.m.; a rule he was not aware of. He asked for a point of order for why the meeting is to end at a specific time.

Chair Williams stated that the concluding time of the meeting was stated on the meeting notice as well as at the beginning of the meeting.

Rep. Lynn asked that those present who are providing public comment who are frequent attendees of the committee to defer their testimony as there are several new people present today.

Chair Williams opened the committee floor for public comment.

Chuck Taylor, president of the Delaware Charter Network board of directors, opposed the bill. Mr. Taylor emphasized the need for school choice for parents in Delaware.

Dr. Jon Mariucci, Executive Director of the Delaware School Board Association (DSBA), voiced support for the bill. He stated that the DSBA is not opposed to charter schools in general but understands the role charter schools play in the overall public landscape. The DSBA recognizes that modifications to the Advisory Group are beneficial and need to move forward.

Brittany Mumford, DelawareCan, opposed the bill. Ms. Mumford stated the Delaware public school system has many problems that need to be addressed besides charter schools. She noted that while the charter school bill has not been updated since 1996, the funding formula has not been updated in 80 years.

Khanmani Duraikkannan, student at Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. Ms. Duraikkannan explained the achievements of Odyssey Charter School as it has grown in the past years. She stated that a moratorium on charter schools would hinder this growth.

Mia Carini, student at Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. Ms. Carini explained that

Odyssey Charter School has been accommodating to her physical illnesses and offers unique classes not in public schools.

James Dechene stated his opposition to the bill. Mr. Dechene explained that his children receive special accommodations from their charter schools not offered anywhere else. He stated his worry of the DDOEs involvement on the Advisory Group as an authorizer. He added that the Redding Consortium overlaps with purpose of the Advisory Group.

Elias Pappas, Head of Schools at Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. Mr. Pappas stated that quality public education should be the focus of the committee. Odyssey Charter School spends money on buses to bring students from the Red Clay Consolidated school district to Odyssey Charter. Mr. Pappas described Odyssey Charter School as a true community school.

Wanda Lopez, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, opposed the Bill. Ms. Lopez urged the Committee members to visit several charter schools in Delaware as they may not see the full scope of what charter schools do. She stated that ASPIRA Academy serves 80 percent students of color and 40 percent English learners.

Dr. Ioanna Lekkakou, Dean of the Greek Department at Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. Dr. Lekkakou stated that for over 15 years she has been working on behalf of the university of Athens to promote Greek language and culture. She boosted Odyssey Charter Schools achievements and the necessity of chart schools in general.

Jeff Koss, Business Manager at Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. Mr. Koss stated that the current charter school application laws already include specific metrics. The charter school community boosts great achievements especially Odyssey Charter School.

Paul Brooks, parent and board member of Odyssey Charter School, opposed the bill. He stated that Odyssey Charter School offered unique education especially in foreign language.

Maria Alons, Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School, opposed the bill. Ms. Alons stated that the Charter School Accountability Committees puts charter schools under a rigorous review process. She added that additional oversight is done by the DDOE.

Maria Matix, Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School, opposed the bill. Ms. Matix stated that the moratorium in this bill will destroy their school. Alonso Charter School provides not only education but wrap around programs that have become even more necessary in the pandemic. She urged the committee to focus on District schools instead of charter schools.

Margie Lopez Waite, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, opposed the legislation. Ms. Waite agreed with Rep. Smith in that the Redding Consortium is already tasked with this issue. She is upset with the timing of this bill as Rep. Wilson-Anton submitted the bill before visiting ASPIRA Academy.

Evelyn Díaz-Camacho, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, opposed the Bill. Ms. Díaz-Camacho stated that she has children with learning disabilities that were not succeeding in public schools.

Dr. Ray Ott stated that his children are public school attendees, but one spent three years in a

charter school. He believes that this choice of education should be allowed and not hindered with this bill. Mr. Ott believes that this is self-promoting on a political aspect.

Courtney Fox, First State Montessori Academy, opposed the bill. Ms. Fox stated that rather than limiting the growth of charter schools the committee should allow the DDOE to continue its work on charter schools.

Deyanna Yancy-Harris, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy, spoke on behalf of her daughter in opposition to the bill. Ms. Yancy-Harris stated that her daughter faced bullying in a public school and is now flourishing at ASPIRA Academy.

Kristin Dwyer, DSEA, supports the bill as long as it is amended to include charter school parents on the Advisory group.

Jennifer Murrero opposed the bill. Ms. Murrero stated that the Christiana School District is losing funds due to children leaving for a Charter school education. She believes this is a reason for this bill and stated that Christiana School District does not meet the needs of its students.

Givel Murrero opposed the bill. Mr. Murrero stated that this bill is not aimed towards finding the deficiencies of charter schools but hiding the deficiencies of the Christiana School District. He urged the committee to focus on the Christiana School District as it is failing.

Alexis Murrero, Student at Gauger-Cobbs Middle School, voiced opposition for the bill. Ms. Murrero explained that she has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is moving to MOT charter to have better catering to her IEP.

Rachel Pulverman-Silverman opposed the bill Ms. Pulverman-Silverman explained that she is a parent to a child with autism and that her needs were not being met in public schools. She chose Newark Charter for her child as it provides high quality education and behavioral therapy not provided by public schools in Delaware. Newark Charter School allowed for a behavioral therapist to accompany her child in the classroom where her child is thriving.

Luann D'Agostino, Executive Board member of the Friends of Christina School District, expressed support for the bill. Ms. D'Agostino mentioned the Wilmington Learning Collaborative as a chance to further explore this topic. She explained that HB 353 offers a pause on new charters for a period of reflection to occur. Reflection on the charter school system will look at existing code and offer recommendations for the future.

Susan Michell, Vice-President of the Friends of Christina School District, supported the bill.

Due to a technical error in the audio recording device for this committee meeting, footage of public comment ends during testimony by Ms. Susan Michell. The committee and staff apologize for this inconvenience.

Kelly Carrabba provided public comment.

Will Wilson provided public comment.

Paul Brooks provided public comment.

A motion was made by Rep. Moore and seconded by Rep. Lynn to release HB 353 from committee; motioned carried. Yes= 10 (Bush, Chukwuocha, Heffernan, Kowalko, Lynn, Matthews, Moore, Morrison, Osienski, and Williams); No= 7 (Briggs King, Collins, Hensley, Postles, Ramone, Smith, and Shupe); Absent=1 (Bolden). The bill was released from committee with a F=3, M=7, U=0, vote.

Chair Williams adjourned the meeting at 5:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Valeria Coverdale, Legislative Fellow

Speaker List:

Robert Overmiller
Jill Flory, Red Clay School District
Dr. Tammy Croce, DASA
Kristin Dryer, DSEA
Kim Klein, DDOE
Chuck Taylor, Delaware Charter Network
Dr. Jon Mariucci, DSBA
Brittany Mumford, DelawareCan
Khanmani Duraikkannan, Odyssey Charter School
Mia Carini, Odyssey Charter School
James Dechene
Elias Pappas, Odyssey Charter School
Wanda Lopez, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy
Dr. Loanna Lekkakou, Odyssey Charter School
Jeff Koss, Odyssey Charter School
Paul Brooks, Odyssey Charter School
Maria Alons, Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School
Maria Matix, Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School
Margie Lopez Waite, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy
Evelyn Díaz-Camacho, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy
Dr. Ray Ott
Courtney Fox, First State Montessori Academy
Deyanna Yancy-Harris, Las Américas ASPIRA Academy
Jennifer Murrero
Givel Murrero
Alexis Murrero, Gauger-Cobbs Middle School
Rachel Pulverman-Silverman
Luann D'Agostino, Friends of Christina School District
Susan Michell, Friends of Christina School District
Kelly Carrabba
Will Wilson
Paul Brooks

3.23.22 House Education Meeting

Public Comment

1. HB 352 & HB 353 / Submitted by Margie López Waite / March 23, 2022, at 9.48 a.m.



Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

March 23, 2022

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I am writing to you to oppose recent legislation that negatively impacts school choice, such as HB 352 and 353. Based on your work on this committee, I know you share my passion for education. I know your intentions are good so I can only conclude that if you are supporting these bills, then it is based on your belief that the end result will be improving public education for all. So, let me explain why I don't share that belief.

First, HB 352 would stop any new charter schools from opening or existing schools from expanding in the future simply if the State Board decides such action would have a negative impact on a school district. This would include allowing school choice for more students, which is the purpose of charter schools and district choice programs. So, is there any situation where a new charter or charter expansion would not impact a school district? I would say no...hence the true intention behind the bill.

Second, you may believe these bills is necessary to support the Wilmington Learning Collaborative (WLC). That was the justification given by others advocating for a moratorium on charter schools. As your colleague, I agree that we need to take immediate action to support our Wilmington students. I have volunteered my time for years, just like you, to find a solution to the growing opportunity gaps revealed in the disaggregated SBAC data. I want the WLC to be successful for the sake of our students and I know the other charter leaders want the same. We chose this profession because we want what is best for all students. With that said, I don't understand how targeting charter schools with a moratorium serves our shared goals. In the spirit of collaboration, this should have been discussed at the Redding Consortium where we could have worked together for the common good.

Third, I have heard it stated that these bills will improve equity in education. How can we argue with that? We all want equity in education, but this statement actually gets to the core of the issue here. How many of our legislators and State Board members have visited a charter school? Out of these that have, how many of them have visited schools like ASPIRA, Eastside, Edison, Kuumba, Great Oaks or Academia Alonso? You see...most people have an issue with charter schools because their only point of reference is Charter School of Wilmington or Newark Charter. These are two outstanding charter schools and their accomplishments should be applauded; however, instead there are people that use these two examples to argue their point that charters are only serving "advantaged" students. These people are misinformed and perpetuate this myth every chance they get. Our charter schools serve a diverse population of students. ASPIRA academy serves 80% students of color, 60% students qualify for free/reduced meals, 40% English Learners, 17% students with learning differences. At ASPIRA, these students are provided every advantage possible to be successful in school and life. So, if that is what is meant by serving "advantaged" children, then I guess we do.

Lastly, you may feel these bills is not about stopping charter schools, but improving the process so they are better integrated into the entire school system. If the only intent was to "improve the process", then the focus should be on the authorization and accountability process within the Delaware Department

of Education (DDOE) and school districts. No need to throw out the baby with the bath water. Instead, they are proposing an advisory board that will comprise of 6 school district superintendents, the Secretary of Education (currently and historically a former school district superintendent), 2 charter leaders and others. This board will determine the future of charter schools. Now, I'm not a gambler but does anyone think the odds are favorable for charter schools with this advisory board? It is like putting the fox in charge of the hen house and trying to convince the hens that the fox is a vegan. The true intent is clear.....the powers that be do not support charter schools and see this as an opportunity to stop their growth.

In closing, I have to say that I am most disappointed by the timing of these bills. It is frustrating that our charter communities have to defend their existence after experiencing the toughest two years of our lives with the COVID pandemic. There was a time, not long ago, that teachers and all those in education were placed on a pedestal for being on the front line of the pandemic. How quickly we forget the physical and mental toll of this pandemic on our students, families and staff. At a time when our legislators should be focusing on supporting students, educators and schools as a whole with more resources, instead you have chosen to sponsor legislation that continues to divide our communities. There are better solutions to improve our state's public education system. Solutions that are innovative and collaborative. Solutions that build bridges instead of creating greater division. I have seen this divisiveness in other states, but I was proud to say that the Delaware Way was better than that. ***Unfortunately, we seem to be losing our way.***



Margie López Waite

Chief Executive Officer

Las Américas ASPIRA Academy

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2. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Andrea Dean / March 23, 2022, at 9:52 a.m.

As a charter school parent I want to go on record that I am strongly opposed to HB 353. This bill takes away a parents ability to CHOOSE the education they want to provide for their children.

Delaware charter schools are some of the high Rea performing schools in the state. This bill looks to dismantle something with a proven track record and incorporate it into the failing public school systems. This bill will force parents and families out of the area and state in search of better education opportunities.

Thank you,
Andrea Dean

3. HB 352 & HB 353 / Submitted by Cory Brewster / March 23, 2022, at 11:06 a.m.

To the DE House Committee and DE Board of Education and ALL concerned citizens:

PLEASE DO NOT VOTE FOR BILLS 352 AND 353.

Bill 352 is a power grab by the local school districts to control the funding of Charter Schools and dictate how those funds are used.

It would NOT allow Charter Schools the freedom to follow the universal state guidelines that all learning institutions have to follow, while at the same time allowing them autonomy to use other "non-state" funding for the betterment of the individual charter school "as the charter school community sees fit."

The very reason parents such as myself choose Charter Schools like Odyssey is because Charter Schools offer a better education and experience than what my local school district (Colonial) provides.

I should have the right to choose how my child learns and not be held to the narrow vision of individuals or a state mandated school district that has monetary or political priorities OTHER than my child.

BILL 353 is ambiguous at best and allows room for the state or local school districts to dictate what constitutes "IMPACT". This could be defined as anything that is not seen as necessary or unacceptable by a "narrow few" who again has priorities OTHER than MY CHILD!

Please be active in support of students' rights! Support school choice and oppose any regulations or legislation that would eliminate or restrict their rights like our (Odyssey Charter School) ability to use our own buildings and populate them accordingly.

Please ensure that education funding is equitable and follows the student as originally intended and

don't give oversight to school districts.

Please be accountable to "ensure monies intended for Charter Schools are NOT manipulated or withheld."

As a voter in DE, I will support candidates who support charter schools and freedom of choice.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,
Cory Brewster

4. HB 352 & HB 353 / Submitted by Lynn Mey / March 23, 2022, at 1:05 p.m.

HB352: as I review the performance of the schools in New Castle County, the TOP 2 performing schools are Wilmington Charter and Newark Charter. If you are focused on providing our children with the best education, we would be looking at all of what is making these schools successful, expanding not constraining this success. What are the criteria you are considering for “negative impact”? Negative impact on who? The students? The parents? If schools are failing to meet the needs of students, the students and their parents must be given access to choices that meet their needs to be successful.

HB353: Input on the formation of an Advisory Group to review the process for granting new or modifying existing charter schools:

The makeup of this group appears to be essentially all “appointed” members; appointed by the Governor, not elected by constituents/taxpayers/parents.

If this is allowed to proceed, at a minimum, this ‘advisory group’ should be made up of primarily parents of children from each of the school districts and taxpayers.

I recommend voting NO on both of these bills.

-Lynn Mey

5. HB 352, HB 353 & HB 238 / Submitted by Julia Kegelman / March 23, 2022, at 1:24 p.m.

As a parent of two children who attend Frist State Montessori Academy I am concerned that HB 352, HB 353 and HB 238 will negatively impact their educational experience. We chose this charter school because it provides a learning style that is not offered in the Brandywine School District and we feel that it has helped our son from being labeled with behavioral issues and has given our daughter a strong sense of how to self direct her activities throughout the day. It has been a blessing to our entire family to be a part of this community throughout the past two years. The school was able to provide options that made it possible for each family do what was best for them during the pandemic while still providing a solid educational experience. I did not hear such things from the other families in our neighborhood when they were expressing their frustration with the Brandywine School District. Being a part of a smaller community allowed FSMA to make policies that best fit their students and families

These bills will takes away educational choice, keeps children trapped in failing schools, and harms the community by not allowing for excellent school options – either new or expanding existing. Please vote NO on HB 352, HB 353 and HB 238.

Thank You,

Julia Kegelman

6. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Laretha Odumosu / March 24, 2022, at 9:12 a.m.



Public Comment – HB353
March 23rd, 2022

Good Afternoon,

My name is Dr. LaRetha Odumosu and I am the Executive Director of Charter School of New Castle Middle School, where I have served for the past 7 years. I have also recently been elected into the position of serving as the Lead for Charter Leaders as the Chair. I am writing this comment because I have deep concerns regarding HB353. Before sharing why, I do think it's important that you understand from what vantage point I enter this conversation. To provide you with a quick background, this is my 17th year as a formal educator and prior to coming to Delaware, I taught HS English in Trenton NJ, served as an Assistant Principal in Philadelphia and received my PhD in Urban Education. I have committed my life's work to working with Black and Brown students.

The school where I currently serve as the Executive Director, Charter School of New Castle, is nested in the middle of New Castle County and serves ~760 students annually. Our student population includes students who are 88% African-American, 40% Low income and 12% unique learners. As I have always been, this population of students is one which I am proud to serve and plan to continue serving for as long as possible. It's also important to know that I have spent all of my educational career in charter schools. I have personally experienced the difference between a charter school that was struggling to survive and a high performing charter network with a history of high academic growth and student outcomes. I have led a charter school through a transformation process which moved it from the brink of school closure to being one of the most successful schools for students serving our specific demographic in the state. I share all of this to say – I have seen a lot and done a lot – so I enter this conversation as one whose viewpoint may be helpful for a conversation such as this.

There are a number of reasons regarding why I am concerned about HB353 and I am happy to speak to any of the House Education Committee members to discuss further. However, to simply outline my concerns, they are as follows:

- **The bill as currently designed generalizes modifications**, which while including expansion and increased charter seats – of which I believe the focal point may be – also includes a number of other operations that directly impact how charters make adjustments to support the students in front of them. Due to the unique charter missions and varying types of charters, there is no way an advisory group can create guidelines that will appropriately respond to the level of variety within the charter community. As a result the guidance will result in some level of bias that will impact any given charter's ability to meet its own mission, charter and/or vision.
- **The advisory group as currently designed outnumbers representatives from the actual charter community**. I do not imagine a world where an advisory group for school districts would include six charter leaders and two district superintendents. If that is not the case, why is the reverse



appropriate? I can tell you from experience that many district leaders have not worked in a charter school, nor do they understand the nuance of wearing multiple school leader hats in the ways that charters must operate. To give you an example, in working with a non-profit

organization group, it took three meetings for me to explain why the way she was requesting information for me would be a nearly impossible feat because she did not understand why I did not have a person dedicated specifically to the role. As an Executive Director, I along with my colleague, am simultaneously, the principal (responsible for all internal school operations) and the superintendent (responsible for all external school operations), as well as the data analyst, the leadership coach, the grant manager, etc. To have people in positions of creating guidance for charter leaders, who have not actually worked in charter schools, is a gross injustice and disservice to those who do.

- **The bill as currently designed provides a proposed solution to an unclear problem.** As an educator and school leader, I am often the recipient of many ideas. In response, I often find myself asking a series of questions - "What problem are we trying to solve? Does this solution solve it? And if so, what are the assumed benefits and what are the unintended consequences?" For HB353 – I ask of the committee these same questions – What problem are we really trying to solve? If the issue is an equitable experience for all students, does a bill geared towards the charter community – which serves less than 20% of the school population solve it? Also, if the bill as designed is the proposed solution, then what are some unintended consequences? Does biased guidance for schools like mine, schools working directly with groups traditionally and historically underserved by the school system, solve a problem or create yet another one? I am in favor of solutions. I am in favor of fixing the system. Yet ultimately, I am in favor of ensuring that the students I serve, the Black and Brown students whose parents chose to remove them from the traditional system because they were being underserved, are not getting the "short end of the stick."

I encourage you to meet with the charter leaders who are going to be impacted by this bill. I encourage you to hear from us - those of us who are in the school buildings doing the work, those of us who are wearing both principal and superintendent hats, those of us who are looking students in the face during morning greeting every single morning, those of us who are meeting directly with parents and hearing why they chose to trust us with their kids – before passing sweeping legislation that may do more harm than good. Thank you.

Humbly Submitted,

LaRetha C.P. Odumosu, Ph.D

Executive Director
Charter School of New Castle - Middle

7. HB 352 & HB 353 / Submitted by Carina Slater / March 24, 2022, at 1:01 p.m.

Good afternoon,

I am the parent of two children attending MOT Charter School (with another starting Kindergarten there in the Fall). I am heavily involved in their education and within the school itself. We chose MOT Charter because of their academic offerings, proximity to our home, specific learning methods and teaching styles, flexibility that they offer and school community, to name a few reasons.

I am urging each of you to **VOTE NO on HB 352 and HB 353.** These bills aim to take educational choice away from families. These bills keep children trapped in underperforming schools or schools that do not meet their unique needs. These bills harm our community by not allowing for the continued growth of successful and high-performing charter schools. These bills also allow district schools to become complacent by limiting or eliminating other viable, local educational options.

When Delaware adopted the Charter School Act of 1995, the intent was to “create an alternative to traditional public schools operated by school districts and improve public education overall.” Further, this act was meant to “improve student learning; encourage the use of different and innovative ... teaching and learning methods; provide parents and students with improved measures of school performance and greater opportunities in choosing public schools within and outside their school districts; and to provide for a well-educated community.” In all of these areas I believe it can definitively be stated that this act was a resounding success. Now with more than 17,000 young people attending 23 schools across the state, charter schools have clearly met and exceeded these goals.

I am completely against these two bills being released from Committee because this is yet another attempt to impede on parental rights, which include a parent's decision to put their children in a school where they believe their child has the best shot at success.

To deliberately and intentionally pass a bill that limits and sets restrictions on these *successful* charter schools will only punish our children (and future leaders of this world). Perhaps the focus of our elected legislators should turn to improving our underperforming public schools specifically, rather than attempts to stifle our successful charter schools.

As your constituent, a life-long Delawarean, and mother of three charter school students, I strongly urge you to **VOTE NO on HB 352 and HB 353.**

Regards,
Carina Slater

8. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Kendall Massett / March 24, 2022, at 1:11 p.m.

Below, please find my full Public Comment statement for HB 353:

Good afternoon, Kendall Massett, Executive Director for the Delaware Charter Schools Network

We oppose HB 353.

First, I would like to note that had the sponsor reached out to our charter community to discuss this bill before filing we may not have believed that this bill was anti-charter. She did not.

June 26, 2013, HB 165 was signed into law by Governor Markell. That bill was the first **major and comprehensive update** to the charter school law since its inception in 1995. It was a **substantial review of our charter school law** by numerous stakeholders across the education community including DSEA, Superintendents, DDOE, and the SBE, as well as legislators that are still in office today, and the Governor's office. All of these stakeholders were involved in the crafting and the passage of that legislation that **improved the process and criteria for new and expanding charters** including consideration of both the positive and negative potential impacts on the community.

Educators choose to work in our schools because they believe in the flexibility they have to do what is necessary to educate the children in their classrooms every day. Parents are making charter school choices to meet the various needs of their children. They are choosing the public school that works best for them.

However, until every student has an opportunity for an excellent public education, we need to do more and do better.

That is why, the charter community decided to do a **strategic plan for the charter school movement**. With the goal to address the following questions:

- Where do we want to see charter schools in a year, 3 years, 5 years, 10 years?
- What is equity and quality in education? What does that look like? How do we – districts and charters - get there together?
- What are the barriers and the policy levers that will be needed to get through those barriers?
- What best practices have we learned in our charter schools over the last 25 years? How have we captured those? Disseminated those? And how can we capture best practices, not only in our charter schools but in district schools as well, and disseminate those in the future?

One of the best focus group conversations we have had so far was with a small group of District Superintendents – because those in the work know that the only way to move forward and reach

the goal of providing a solid foundation for our children is together – **not because we are required to be, but because we want to be.**

We have never just been in this work for the kids that come through our doors – the whole point of the charter community is to **make an impact on the lives of all of Delaware's children.**

We are here.

We are doing the work.

And our doors are always open.

9. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Celeste Payne / March 24, 2022, at 4:41 p.m.

To Whom This May Concern:

The following message serves as **public comment** on **HB 353**, which was considered by the Delaware General Assembly's House Education Committee on Wednesday, March 23, 2022.

I am a member of the board of directors for **Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School** in Wilmington, and I was unable to attend yesterday afternoon's Delaware House Education Committee meeting. As a diversity practitioner and social justice educator who has worked in schools for nearly three decades, I am committed to schools with school cultures that promote culturally competency and equity literacy that prepare students for an increasingly diverse world.

As a dual language immersion charter school, Academia does just. Mirroring the global majority, our student body and teachers practice diversity, inclusion, and equity every day. School choice empowers families like those of our students to choose schools that meet their children's needs intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

If Academia's students remained in their local public schools, they would not the opportunity to see teachers and administrators who look like them and who talk like them. They would not feel that their perspective is seen and heard by the adults. It's important to recognize that some of what is characterized as academic excellence places a priority on content, assessments, and experiences that serve students with existing privileges (including race, gender, and native language) at the expense of those who are marginalized due to their identity. How will this kind of educational inequity prepare students to be citizens and leaders of our world?

For years, Academia's parents have hoped and asked for a middle school, which can continue to educate their children. This year, we hope to answer this request. Academia is engaged in the process of seeking a major modification on our charter. We have received and responded to all of the questions and concerns posed by the Delaware's Department of Education Charter School Accountability Committee. Earlier this week, CSAC endorsed unanimously Academia's request for a major modification to our charter. We only await the decision of Delaware's Secretary of Education, which will be announced in May.

It's very troubling to learn that this established process could potentially be circumvented by the charter school moratorium legislation introduce only a week ago and possibly enacted retroactively. This renders educators and citizens powerless and silences their voices in the process of educating children. It also does so with a process that might be described as not fully transparent.

For all of these reasons, I write to ask you to vote no on HB 353 at this time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Celeste Payne
Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School
Board of Directors

10. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Dr. Maria Alonso/ March 24, 2022, at 5:02 p.m.

I am opposed to the HB353 bill:

First, the proposal to create a moratorium will have destructive repercussions. You will single handedly destroy a thriving charter school that was created to not only offer children the gift of a second language but to address the many basic needs of a community of children and families that was not being met at their local district schools. Your moratorium will shut down La Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School, a dual language school that serves over 600 children and families. 75% Latino and 25% black children and families to be more exact. Really? Our modification is requesting the ability to move to a larger facility to house our K-5 school and to allow for the expansion to grade 8. Our enrollment depends on the latter as parents want their children to experience K-8. It is not an option; it is a parent demand.

Research on charter schools has found, at varying times and in varying contexts, that Charters are *more* effective for low-income students and students of color than for white and more affluent students. Beyond a language immersion education, **our school provides wrap-around services, food, shelter, mental health care and a frontline defense against abuse and neglect. The pandemic has reminded us of how essential these services are. You will single-handedly destroy these opportunities for over 600 brown and black children and their families in Delaware.**

Think about this:

Parents in this state, that you represent, are fleeing district schools (not charter schools). The process that charter schools go through to come into being and for their 5-10 year renewal period is rigorous and holds us accountable to look at ourselves and do better every day. Is your Advisory board going to review similar processes in district schools? I didn't see that in House Bill 353.

I would advise that you create an Advisory board to examine why district schools in the state are losing children and families by the hundreds and thousands. What about taking a look at that? Again, I repeat, La Academia was created because our Latino and black children were not being adequately served in their local district schools. Your advisory board's efforts would be better spent looking for solutions to that matter. Instead you target Charter schools...the educational safe havens that parents are fleeing to for sanctuary and hope for their children's future.

You need to replace this egregious act against charter schools with curiosity about why parents are fleeing the districts. It is my hope that sponsor of this bill, invest more on your political courage and your imagination in order to improve the choices parents have for their children's education in this state. Review away, but for both charters and district schools. Remember egregious act destroy, while curiosity and imagination have the power to create something unimagined yet and much greater. What will you consciously choose...you have the option to

destroy lives and opportunities for the most disadvantaged and marginalized or to create more paths in district schools to serve the most disenfranchised members of our state. As publicly professed social justice warriors, I remain open and curious about what you will choose.

Dr. Maria Alonso
Board President
Academia Antonia Alonso Charter School

11. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Kim Whyte / March 24, 2022, at 3:24 p.m.

My Name is Kim Whyte. I am the director of Education Enrichment at Las Americas ASPIRA Academy which has successfully expanded to educate High School students in addition to elementary and middle school. ASPIRA serves a diverse population of over 1,000 students with a specific mission to empower the Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth. Like all Charter Schools, we set out to meet the needs of the people we serve. We fill voids and answer prayers of families looking for a place where their children will have a sense of belonging while being empowered with the academic and social-emotional skills necessary to be successful, productive citizens in today's society. It's by no mistake that Charters were created and it's also no mistake that they have been supported for decades by political figures and policymakers. Yet, here we are today speaking out against HB353 which will undo what many worked so hard to achieve. Opposition and division when it comes to Charters are inevitable, especially when we know its roots are so tangled. Charter schools have been discriminated against by those who are threatened by their existence since the beginning of the argument for school choice. Maybe this is just a coincidence, but I find it necessary to point out that the same schools being discriminated against are those that serve a disproportionate amount of minorities which are more racially segregated than traditional public/district schools. It's my privilege to work in and give back to children who attend our Charter because of those who have come before me such as Friedman who proposed in the 60s that the government provide needy families with vouchers that they can redeem at private schools which allowed market forces, not the government, to shape public education- causing failing schools to close and compelled individuals and organizations to open competitors. Or Finn who said that the propulsion toward school choice is and has always been that "way too few kids in America have been able to pick their schools, and way too many have been stuck in bad schools that they have no alternative to." History repeats itself, even more reason that it's up to people like me, like all of us who are here to speak out against HB353 to continue where people like Milton Freidman, TheodoreSizer, Chester Finn, Albert Shanker, and everyone from the NAACP to the Walton Family Foundation to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Bill Clinton who signed a federal support program for charters in 1994 and every president since who has advocated for school choice, to continue the Charter legacy. So please, exercise your right to choose and vote NO on HB353.

Thank you!

12. HB 353 (Sponsor: Wilson-Anton) / Submitted by Giovanna Whyte / March 24, 2022, at 3:28 p.m.

My name is Giovanna Whyte

I am a 7th-grade student at Las Americas ASPIRA Academy charter school, known as ASPIRA for short, whose vision is “A fellowship of learners building culturally-inclusive communities” and whose mission is “To educate and empower each student to realize their full potential and positively impact their communities.” And that is exactly why I am here today! When I entered ASPIRA as a 7th-grader this fall, I had in my mind that I wanted to join AVID and learn about skills such as public speaking. What I didn’t have in mind is using this newly learned skill to speak as a 12-year-old girl attempting to persuade adults to do right by children. With that in mind, please bear with me. You see, while public speaking may be a fear I am working to get through, it doesn’t make me as fearful as the thought of losing freedom of choice, which is one of the 3 basic values that form the foundation of Charter schools. The other 2 basic values are opportunity and responsibility. It Seems there are some commonalities between what Charter schools and this country were founded on. In addition to AVID, I am also the Vice President of ASPIRA’s BSU- Black Student Union. This union, like my charter school, has given me a sense of belonging and purpose and strives to equip me with essential leadership skills- all of which I have come prepared to use today. I am using my voice to take you back to when President Obama revised the School Improvement Grants program and developed the Race to the Top Program to help underperforming, fully funded public schools transform into Charter Schools. Let’s go back a little further to 2006 when President Bush pushed the Charter movement along by creating a Choice incentive that allowed parents to transfer their students to other schools if they chose to. Now let’s go back even further to a time when there was no choice and students went where they were forced to go. I didn’t live during that time and I don’t want to. That is why I am here today, using my 3 minutes as effectively as I can to urge you to not pass House Bill 353. Please do not eliminate the possibility of approval, expansion, operation, and/or authorization of charter schools. Don’t take away our freedom of choice! Thank you.