



Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance

October 27, 2015

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance and our own organizations, we urge you to **keep the cap** on charter schools. Collectively, we represent hundreds of thousands of parents, students, educators and social justice advocates across the Commonwealth.

When the Legislature first authorized charter schools in the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act, several caps were imposed, including permitting a maximum of 25 Commonwealth charter schools. Those limits have been raised several times, most recently in 2010. This year, we have been asked to accept another cap lift to avoid more egregious proposals. The threat is that if we don't agree to yet another legislative compromise, we will face a ballot question that is even more damaging than most of the bills before you.

We speak with one voice in response to this threat: Enough. We cannot compromise out of fear. We urge you to oppose lifting *any* of the existing caps on Commonwealth charter schools. We understand this means we will almost certainly have to fight a ballot initiative in 2016, a question that would, if passed, cost district public schools hundreds of millions of dollars and wrest even more control over public education from our cities and towns. We are prepared to take on that fight because, while we know we will be outspent by the well-funded corporate- and foundation- backed pro-charter forces, we believe we will win. Our research shows that a growing number of voters share our concerns about the ways charter schools are cannibalizing our district public schools.

- **This year alone, charters are diverting more than \$419 million from district schools after taking reimbursements into account.** This leaves district schools with inadequate resources to provide their students with the basic education services, enrichment activities and social services they need and deserve.
- **Charters are often approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education over the strong objections of a large majority of local taxpayers, residents and elected officials in the affected communities.** In addition, once a charter is approved, parents and students have no recourse to address problems caused by the school.
- **Most charter schools fail to serve as many high-need students as their sending districts, especially English language learners who have very little English proficiency, students with significant disabilities and very low-income students.** As a result, districts have fewer resources to educate a higher-need population, leading to flight from district schools and a downward spiral.
- **Most urban charters use a hyper-disciplinary model that drives out students who don't fit their paradigm, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.** In addition, despite repeated unverified claims of long waitlists, charters generally fail to fill vacancies when these students leave or are pushed out.

We have taken on this fight because we believe it is our duty as a commonwealth to cherish, support and improve our democratically controlled, publicly funded public schools that serve all children, not to create a parallel school system that too often fails to serve the students who have the greatest needs. We hope you will join us in this fight to keep the *public* in public education.

Sincerely,

*Donna Bivens, Director
Boston Busing/Desegregation Project*

*Juan M. Cofield, President
NAACP, New England Area Conference*

*Jeff Crosby, President
North Shore Labor Council*

*Russ Davis, Executive Director
Massachusetts Jobs With Justice*

*Caitlin Donnelly, Rachel Gunther, Jenny Sazama
Youth on Board*

*Paul Drake, Executive Director
Massachusetts Interfaith Worker Justice*

*Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, Executive Director
Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH)*

*Tom Gosnell, President
American Federation of Teachers MA*

*Lisa Guisbond, Executive Director
Citizens for Public Schools*

*Teena-Marie Johnson
Youth Organizers United for the Now Generation (YOUNG Coalition)*

*Beth Kontos, President
Salem Teachers Union*

*Barbara Madeloni, President
Massachusetts Teachers Association*

*Johnny McInnis, President
Black Educators' Alliance of Massachusetts*

*Sandra McIntosh
Coalition for Equal Quality Education*

*Monty Neill, Executive Director
National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)*

*Donald Perry, President
Arise for Social Justice*

*Rich Rogers, Executive Secretary-Treasurer
Greater Boston Labor Council*

*Marlena Rose, Coordinator
Boston Education Justice Alliance*

*Horace Small, Director
Union of Minority Neighborhoods*

*Richard Stutman, President
Boston Teachers Union*

*Steven Tolman, President
Massachusetts AFL-CIO*

*Megan Wolf
Quality Education for Every Student (QUEST)*