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# **SOUTHFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Testimony to the House Education Committee, State of Michigan  
Regarding SB618

Fern Katz, Vice-President, Southfield Board of Education, Tuesday, November 29, 2011

SB618 removes all caps on charters, eliminates geographic boundaries for authorizers, removes the co-mingling prohibition on the use of authorizer funds and provides property tax exemptions to property owners who lease land or buildings to charter entities. I speak in opposition to this bill which is designed to negatively impact my district, Southfield, and all other districts, under the mistaken notion that it will help children.

There are 18 charter schools in Oakland County and 8 of them are in Southfield. The charters came to Southfield because Southfield has a long boundary with Detroit and Southfield has an abundance of empty buildings due to the economic downturn in Michigan. Most of the students in these charters are from Detroit but since the fourth Friday count 98 students have enrolled in Southfield schools from other schools, many of them charters while their charters kept the money. It would behoove this committee to find out why so many students in so many districts are leaving charters after the fourth Friday count, depriving our schools of the foundation allowance for these students.

Since the election of 2010, calls to raise the cap on charter schools and use EMOs have spiked. Instead of helping struggling schools by using data driven methods, states have moved to punish school districts (and their students) by decreasing funds, legislating standards and allowing public funds to be used by for profit companies.

It definitely is not fair to Southfield students to allow more charter schools to open in our district. Removing the cap, allowing tax exemptions to building owners for charters, and co-mingling authorizer funds will have a negative financial impact on Southfield and other public school districts. Yes, there are some good charter schools, but I have yet to meet a Superintendent or Principal who does not complain of the negative impact that charters have on public education. The public funds are watered down and pressure is put on districts to provide more with less, especially for charter students who arrive after the count day.

In addition there is a direct financial conflict of interest. Three percent of state funds to charters go directly to the authorizers. Authorizers have the sole authority to shut down any of their charter schools. If they do shut down one of their schools they lose that three percent. Authorizers who have dozens of charters find them to be a large source of income and may hesitate to shut down an under-performing school. The authority to shut down a school should not lie with the authorizer but with the elected State Board of Education.

My district has a 92% graduation rate, International Baccalaureate and K-8 pre Baccalaureate, University High School, Southfield Regional Academic Campus (the best alternative school in the state), academies for specialization, and much, much more to satisfy the most meticulous parents wanting the best education for their children. I find it hard to understand why the State legislature is trying so hard to undermine what we do, educate children.