



FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

May 8, 2014

Dear Representative,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), I'm writing today regarding the **Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act (H.R.10)**. FFCC is a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions.

We are encouraged to see the bipartisan work in the House of Representatives on H.R.10, as it reflects a desire from both Democrats and Republicans to improve educational opportunities children. But this bill can be greatly improved to better reach this laudable goal. As you consider this legislation, FFCC hopes that you will support amendments that:

Improve financial oversight and reduce fraud. Recent reports have revealed that current federal policy allows for waste, fraud, and abuse of federal funds by some charter schools, including by using public funds illegally for personal gain, using public funds to support other businesses, mismanaging money and putting children in danger, inflating enrollment numbers to increase public funds received, and receiving public money for services not provided. We urge you to vote for the following amendments that begin to address these issues:

- **Cassidy #23**, for the GAO to track and audit public funds and examine if administrative costs are appropriate;
- **Castor #14**, for the Secretary of Education to develop and enforce conflict of interest guidelines for charter school operators and funders; and
- **Moore #1**, which sets aside 2 percent of state funds so states can provide additional oversight of funds going to charter schools.

Remove barriers to entry. Charter schools that set their own enrollment policies often have requirements that traditional public schools do not have, such as parent interviews and parent volunteer time. This is unfair for many students who cannot meet these additional requirements and are therefore unable to attend certain public charter schools. We ask that you vote yes on:

- **Bass #17**, co-sponsored by Representatives Marino, McDermott, and Bachmann, which would eliminate barriers to entry for children in the foster care system. Though this amendment only addresses the barrier to entry issue for one student subgroup, it is an important step toward requiring charter schools to accept all students who are entitled to a free public education.

Increase transparency for students, parents, and families. Families living in areas with both traditional public schools and charter schools often face uncertainties in what different schools offer, how to enroll or apply, and school discipline practices, among other issues. To increase school transparency and give students, parents, and families additional information regarding schools in their area, we urge you to vote yes on the following amendments:

- **Grayson #2**, co-sponsored by Representatives Clarke and Wilson, provides assurances that charter schools will measure and report student retention rates in their annual assessments.

- **Jackson Lee #9**, for online publication of information regarding student recruitment, orientation materials, enrollment criteria, student discipline policies, behavior codes, parent contract requirements, and any additional financial obligations such as fees for tutoring or extra-curricular activities.
- **Wilson #12**, co-sponsored by Representatives Rodney Davis, Duckworth, Grayson, McKinley, and Fudge, to ensure the collection and public dissemination of information about charter schools, including student support services and annual performance and enrollment data, so parents are better informed to make decisions about their children's education.
- **Sanchez #25**, which requires states to report on how charter schools foster community involvement.

Increase student services. Public schools must offer a number of additional student services outside of the classroom to ensure student academic success and to better prepare students for life post-graduation. As such, we urge you to vote yes on:

- **Langevin #13**, co-sponsored by Representative Glenn Thompson, which would add comprehensive career counseling to the prioritization criteria for grants to LEAs.

Though there are other opportunities to better improve this legislation, of the amendments ruled in order for debate the amendments listed above will improve the way charter schools serve their students and their students' parents, families, and communities while reducing waste, fraud, and abuse of federal funds.

We look forward to working with you further to improve educational opportunities for every child in this country. If you have any questions please contact Kevin Lindsey, Senior Director, Education Policy, at KevinL@firstfocus.net.

Sincerely,



President