

**Jill Johnson, Principal of Explorations Charter School**  
**Testimony on S.B. 1096 – State Education Committee**

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee, my name is Jill Johnson, and I am the principal and a math teacher at Explorations Charter School in Winsted.

I am here to testify against Senate Bill 1096, and the proposed charter moratorium included in the bill.

When people think about charter schools, they often gloss over schools like Explorations. We are the only rural charter in the state, serving 86 public high school students – 38% of which are special education – from 19 different communities. Due to the fact that 84% of our students come from out of our hosting community, the fact that charters do not receive transportation assistance poses a financial and attendance challenge.

Instead, our families carpool, drive their kids individually or, beginning two years ago, we as a school pay for transportation costs out of our per-pupil funding. In fact, we spend \$35,000 a year of our own money on a bus for students coming from Torrington, which sends 46 students to our school.

You might wonder why families and students go through so much trouble? It's because we're providing these young men and women with a uniquely supportive environment. We help our students develop a healthy attitude toward their school, community, work, family, and, most important, toward their own sense of self. Our students graduate ready to help build a brighter future for us all.

Someone asked me recently what the typical Explorations student looks like. The fact is, there isn't one. Whether it's because they have a unique learning style, have been bullied, or didn't feel like they fit in, at Explorations we take the round, square, and triangular pegs and work to fit them, not the other way around.

The common thread all our students' share is that their local district school wasn't working for them, and they needed another option. Our school takes pride in being able to fill that role, and having served students since August 1997, I wonder what the lives of our past and present students would've looked like without Explorations there to support them.

The fact is, the children we serve in Litchfield County aren't alone. Across the state, there are parents who can tell that their kids aren't supported by their current learning environment; those parents and their children deserve to have other options.

The proposed moratorium on new charter schools denies parents that opportunity. Worse still, it prevents communities from coming together to ask the state for that new option, regardless of how many children might need help right now.

Students in Connecticut should not have to wait for a school that fits their needs. Please oppose this charter moratorium. Send a message to parents and students in our state that taking charge of your future is admirable, and if families ask for a great education, our elected leaders will take the time to listen.

Connecticut's charter school community is diverse, and Explorations is one of the many examples we have of a community coming together to improve the future of its youth. Don't shut the door on these opportunities for our children.

Thank you for your time.