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**Testimony of**

**Kate Dias & Joslyn DeLancey**

**Connecticut Education Association**

**Before the  
Education Committee**

**Re:**

**SB 1347 AAC SCHOOL CHOICE  
SB 1349 AAC THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS**

Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Joslyn DeLancey, and I am Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), which represents educators in over 150 school districts across the state. Today I am testifying on SB 1347 and SB 1349.

**SB 1347 AAC SCHOOL CHOICE**

SB 1347 requires the State Department of Education to develop a program for expanding school choice and permits the department to hold public hearings in the process. In considering this bill, we ask legislators to include a stronger and clearly defined voice for educators in the process.

CEA welcomes being part of a discussion toward building a system of public schools that can serve all students well while complementing and supporting our traditional, neighborhood public schools.

## **SB 1349 AAC THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS**

CEA does not support SB 1349 as it is conceived. CEA supports the provision including students who attend charter schools in the ECS formula for the town where the student resides. It's well established that if one student leaves a school, that school still incurs nearly all of the costs for instructing and serving that student.

CEA also welcomes enhanced reporting and oversight of charters by the State Department of Education. As is discussed more fully below, there are additional reporting and other transparency provisions for which we request the committee's consideration.

CEA further believes that any expansion of charter schools in Connecticut should occur in a fiscally responsible way. We believe that expansion should only occur when we can ensure transparency, equity, accessibility, parity, and collaboration with the local school system. The charter school process must also preserve, not diminish, democracy.

However, CEA questions whether the provision requiring the governor to include funding for new charter schools in the governor's budget would violate the constitution's separation of powers. The provision also appears to bind the hands of future legislatures by shifting decisions about such funding to an automated process. We fear that this proposal undermines the power of our constitutional democracy, executed through duly elected representatives.

We also believe that a bill to expand charter schools in the state should also enhance parity with the statutes, laws, and principles followed by traditional public schools. To that end, CEA offers suggestions to enhance the charter school system in Connecticut and to ensure that students are treated fairly, resources are targeted toward classrooms, and democratic oversight is transparent.

The following policy suggestions for the committee's consideration would:

**Provide parity in Special Education** – Makes special education statutes applicable to charter schools.

**Ensure Equity in Student Waitlists and Admissions Lotteries** – Addresses barriers to equity by prohibiting practices like requiring parents to attend school functions or to advise students against applying due to lack of resources to support special education or EL students.

**Address the Pushout of Students** – Require charter schools to conduct exit interviews of students/parents/guardians to determine whether the student has been pushed out or otherwise dissuaded from attending the charter school. Require charter schools to allow students to attend the charter school for all grades offered by the school, as is required of magnet schools.

**Provide Transparency in Student Attrition** – Require charter schools to submit data on the number of special education and ELs relative to the local school district and the number of students who exit the school prior to graduating from that school. Require for any student withdrawing from the school, a signed attestation indicating the reason for withdrawal and whether it was voluntary and whether school personnel discouraged the student from continued enrollment.

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**Ensure Transparency in Student Enrollment** – Require SDE biannual reporting on charter schools to report on matched student cohort graduation rates, suspensions/expulsions, and trends toward reducing racial isolation, mobility, and voluntary and involuntary exits.

**End Special Waivers from Statute** – Phase out charter schools’ waivers from statute, except existing enrollment cap waivers.

**Assess Local Costs and Benefits of New Charter Schools** – Require approval of new charter schools to include an impact analysis of the school’s operation on the local school district.

**Provide Fairness in Transportation Costs** – Require charter schools to be responsible for the transportation costs of their students, rather than continuing to shift that financial burden to the school districts where the student resides.

**Keep Funds in Classrooms** – Prohibit use of public funds to advertise for charter school student recruitment.

**Make Charter Management Organization Fees Transparent** – Revise the general statutes to standardize the calculation of per pupil service fees assessed by charter management organizations (CMOs) to ensure transparency and that funds are targeted toward classrooms.

**Ensure Public Meeting Transparency** – Require charter schools to post online the school’s handbook, discipline codes, policies, budgets, donations, advertising expenditures, CMO fees, and contracts.

**Ensure Students Have Fair and Transparent Discipline Policies** – Require fair and publicly posted disciplinary policies and codes of conduct, including student due process rights, prohibitions against assessing of fines or demerits leading to suspensions or expulsions and against punitive measures that demean or humiliate students.

**Extend Freedom of Information Transparency to CMOs** – Extend FOI provisions to CMOs, including donor information, unless a contributor requests his or her name be redacted (limited to 3 years from the year of the donation).

**Ensure Teachers Have Fair and Transparent Due Process Rights** – Require charter schools to provide plain language descriptions of teachers’ due process rights under CGS 10-151.

**Require All Charter School Teachers to Possess Proper Certification** – End the provisions permitting a school to open with up to 50% of its teachers without suitable certification and to carry on with as much as 30% of its teachers uncertified.

Upon request, we can provide legislative language to address the proposals cited above. We also welcome continued discussion toward shaping a system of school choice that serves all students well and complements our public school system.