

# THE **TRUTH** ABOUT HB 97

## The Comprehensive Charter Reform Bill

The reforms embodied in House Bill 97 (HB 97) are critical to improving and strengthening Pennsylvania's Charter School Law. While groundbreaking upon its enactment in 1997, the law has become outdated over time. Pennsylvania's charter school law currently ranks number 34\* nationally and reform must take place now in order to maintain charter, regional charter, and cyber charter schools as a strong, quality school choice option for the Commonwealth's children and families.



### WE SUPPORT THESE PROVISIONS IN HB 97:

- Codifies that all charter schools can participate in dual enrollment.
- Puts hard deadlines in place for charter renewals, which now can drag out for years.
- Adds charter representation to the CAB.
- Gives charters right of first refusal on unused district buildings.
- Clarifies that a charter school or regional charter school that does not have in its written charter any limits on student enrollment or caps is permitted to operate its school at more than one location within the district that authorized its charter.
- Maintains the current law that caps are illegal unless agreed to by the district and the charter school.
- Creates standard applications and performance matrices so district evaluations are more objective, and apples-to-apples comparisons between district and charter schools.
- Cyber charter schools — permitted to use digital books exclusively if they choose; parents can opt out of receiving multiple computers, monitors, etc. if they have more than one child.
- Requires districts, IUs, PASSHE schools and community colleges to rent facilities at same cost to any other non-profit.
- Makes no changes in funding for regular or special education.
- Establishes the Charter School Funding Advisory Commission to study all regulations, laws and policy statements that effect funding in any way, and report back to the General Assembly in 18 months of the effective date of the act. No policy recommendations made by the commission can be enacted or take effect without being approved first by the General Assembly & the Governor — the general assembly would have to write a bill and pass it to actually get the recommendations into law. Charter supporters would be vigorously active in the work of this Commission advocating for all charters and the rights of charter students to equitable funding to their traditional school counterparts.
- Charter schools typically reserve or restrict funds for capital projects or contingencies in committed or restricted funds and that is still permitted under HB 97. However, a limit will be placed on a charter's unrestricted annual fund balance. The limit will be a percentage of the charter's budget for the year. HB 97 does not put any restrictions on currently committed or restricted fund balances or how a charter moves funds into those same fund balances in the future.

\* <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/publications/measuring-model-ranking-state-public-charter-school-laws-2018>