



New York Charter Schools Association Testimony on the Fiscal Year 2024 Executive Budget Submitted to the NYS State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Elementary & Secondary

Fatimah Barker, Interim Executive Director- February 1, 2024

Chairs Kreuger, Weinstein, Mayer, Benedetto and distinguished members of the Legislature, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Fatimah Barker and I am the Interim Executive Director of the New York Charter Schools Association (NYCSA). NYCSA is the statewide non-profit organization serving the public charter school community which includes more than 350 schools serving more than 170,000 students and their families across the state.

Free. Public. Open to all. Charter schools offer the opportunity for families to access high-quality schools regardless of income level or zip code. Our students attend schools dedicated to STEM, STEAM and college prep as well as sports, the arts, special education and more.

Over 90% of children enrolled in public charter schools are students of color and students from low-income households in high-needs communities. And they are thriving, regularly exceeding the statewide averages in reading, writing and math proficiency rates.

In other words, public charter schools are making a positive difference in the lives of thousands of New York's families.

Let me start my testimony today by expressing my gratitude to Governor Hochul for the work she has done in the past year to advance public charter schools. Her championed efforts to authorize the reissuance of returned charters that will not count toward regional limits are applauded. We are appreciative to see our Governor acknowledging the importance of expanding the public charter school landscape across the state, bringing additional educational opportunities to families who need it most. We extol the record-setting \$34.5 billion in total school aid proposed in the state budget and are encouraged by the number of proposals to assist students and families.

Yet despite these wins, there is much more work to be done. Looking ahead, it is crucial that we address funding inequities throughout the state, expand access to facilities funding and provide transportation aid for public charter schools, and support the State Education Department's request for funds to ensure rigorous, high-quality authorizing as well as support SED's request for funding to review and improve Foundation aid from a perspective of supporting the students who need it the most.

With these things in mind, I urge you to take the following actions in the FY2025 Enacted State Budget to improve educational opportunities for all students throughout the state:

Address funding inequities for New York's public charter school students.

The time has come to finally dismantle the funding inequities that plague some of New York's most vulnerable public school students. While charter schools receive state funding, and in many cases, federal entitlement funding, there are many local revenue sources that charter schools are not entitled to, putting them at a direct disadvantage to their district counterparts.

Lower per pupil spending. Lack of facilities aid. Lack of transportation aid. Lack of specific and deliberate guidance to charter schools and their host districts on the provision of related services. And, All of these things add up to an "us vs. them" paradigm.

It is time for this to change.

New York has one of the highest average per pupil spends in the country; we need to ensure that public charter school students receive the same opportunities and support from Albany as their district counterparts. We are one public school system, striving to provide the best possible education for all of our children.

Expand rental assistance and facilities funding for schools that do not currently receive it; Provide transportation aid to public charter schools.

Did you know that public charter school students across New York State are inadvertently paying their school's rent? How is that possible, you might be asking? It's because charter schools are the ONLY public schools in the state not eligible for Building Aid. And while some charter schools in New York City are eligible for

rental reimbursement, not all are, creating even more funding inequity among New York's public schools.

Our children deserve better.

Without facilities funding, public charter schools are forced to use their limited state funding that could be better used for instruction and programming for facilities instead. Ultimately, this funding crisis is shortchanging our state's over 170,000 public charter school students, as they not only do not have access to well-maintained, safe school buildings but in many cases, are also missing out on funding that could be going towards their education.

New York State needs to do its part to provide funding for well built, well maintained and safe schools for ALL public school students, including charter school students.

Similarly, charter schools are not eligible for transportation aid. Some districts are struggling to address transportation issues. As a result, district and charter students are at bus stops very early in the morning and arrive home late in the evening, if they're lucky enough to receive transportation at all. I'll quickly share an anecdote I recently was told by a charter school leader. An entire grade was waiting outside their school, excited for a field trip to a local museum, when the school got the call that a bus was not coming for them. There was no transportation resource to get those students from the school to the museum and back. So the students went back inside their school, which doesn't receive rental assistance, by the way, and continued their day, heartbroken to have not been able to go on this preplanned field trip. Stories like this happen all the time throughout public charter schools in New York State. Making charter schools eligible for transportation aid will help alleviate the administrative burden, streamline bussing logistics and relieve students and families from having to endure cold, dark mornings at the bus stop and long rides to and from school.

Support the State Education Department's request for funds to ensure rigorous, high-quality authorizing as well as support SED's request for funding to review and improve Foundation aid from a perspective of supporting the students who need it the most.

NYCSA fully supports the funding request from the New York State Education Department to continue providing the high-quality, rigorous authorizing the charter sector relies on in this state. Public charter schools throughout New York provide high-quality educational options for families, regardless of zip code or income, and

provide exceptional options for families who reside in areas where traditional district schools cannot meet the needs of their school-aged children.

We also strongly support SED's request for funding to review and improve Foundation Aid to ensure that our state's neediest school communities will be adequately supported. This funding will not just support the mission of public charter schools, but support all students across the state who need it most.

A win for public charter schools is a win for children and families across the state. Every student in New York deserves a good public education, and by supporting public charter schools, you are supporting this notion. You will also be supporting students from all over the state who come from historically underserved and economically disadvantaged communities who deserve more from their state government. Addressing the funding inequities of charter schools throughout the state will raise the standard for all public education. Expanding rental assistance and facilities funding for all public charter schools in New York State will give students the materials they need to prosper in their education and beyond. Providing transportation aid will enable public charter school students across the state to get to and from school safely and on time. Supporting the SED's request for funds will continue to ensure high caliber authorizing of public charter schools and improving Foundation aid will bolster the students in New York who need it most.

The support you give public charter schools today will support public school students for decades to come. The time is now to continue the fight for high-quality public education for all.

I thank you again for this opportunity to present my testimony to you today, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Fatimah Barker, Interim Executive Director, New York Charter Schools Association