

## **Testimony on Senate Bill 127 – Charter School establishment, operation and funding**

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### SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Madam Chairwoman and members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today, and for your dedicated service to the State of Texas, particularly during these difficult budget times. My name is Jerel Booker and as Executive Director of Stand for Children, I have the privilege to speak today on behalf of parents and education advocates who are part of a Stand grassroots network.

Stand for Children is an independent voice for students whose mission is to help all children get the excellent public education and strong support they need to thrive. Our goal is a statewide system of vibrant, high-performing schools that are great places to teach and learn with stable funding and strong leadership.

I would like to preface my remarks with some personal information that underlies my testimony. I was raised by a family of educators that prepared me every day for school and life. My family constantly found teachable moments. Through these moments, I finished law school and decided to teach in an early example of a charter school in west Baltimore. I was able to see first-hand how children and families can benefit from a campus that operates separate from the norm. My school did not fit any particular model and my students did not fit any profile that could be used to adequately prepare a new teacher for their needs. Despite the challenges, expectations ran high and excuses ran low. As a campus, we only found moderate success during my time. But as an educator, I found that independence and autonomy to develop and sustain unique educational missions is required for some children to succeed.

I sit before you today to ask for a favorable consideration on Senator Bill 127 to expand these educational opportunities. Stand for Children exists because children do not have the political power to stand up for their fundamental needs. And right now more than ever, children need high quality public education, regardless of school model.

Public school programs, such as charter schools, virtual schools, and magnet programs, offer enhanced opportunities for students to excel. Successful charters have been able to encourage and enhance teaching and learning, to allow for personalized instruction that enables students to learn based on their unique learning styles, paces, and needs.

We believe in enhancing opportunity for students who, in some instances, may otherwise be trapped in ineffective schools. As a state, we should work together to provide more educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds while reducing the number of low performing schools. The Texas education system as a whole benefits from the informed participation of parents.

District schools are varied just like the needs of the students they serve... not one-size-fits-all, and because of this, parents need more access to a range of high quality school choices. Traditional campuses continue to do amazing things for students. However despite some success, parents are still looking for good, safe schools for their children whether they support one system or another. Charter schools give parents that ability.

While Senate Bill 127 allows many charter schools the increased capacity to be incubators for innovations, this bill also provides the kind of flexibility in remedying struggling schools that become

laboratories for underperformance. Senator Patrick's requirement that only proven charters be granted more flexible expansion rights provides further quality control.

Education leadership must continue to provide valid information on the performance of the education programs available to families. We believe that whatever the education delivery design in a particular school district may be, parents should be afforded the maximum degree of options.

I recognize that funding issues remain under careful consideration by this entire legislative body. As for costs associated with modest charter school expansion, I would respectfully ask this committee to consider the following:

- What is the cost of denying an estimated 56,000 students and parents on Texas charter wait lists the access to a proven education?
- What is the cost to maintain the status quo and relegating multiple years of uniquely skilled black and brown students to be stuck in under-performing schools?

We cannot continue to place success and prosperity on the top shelf, and then only provide one size ladder for children of various heights to climb up.

I respectfully request favorable consideration for Senate Bill 127. I thank you for the time you have provided me.