

Lansing Testimony – SB 618

Good morning. Chairman McMillin thank you for allowing me to address your committee members and provide testimony regarding concerns I have for Senate Bill 618. I am currently the Superintendent for Van Buren Intermediate School District located in Lawrence, which is 25 miles west of Kalamazoo, one mile north of the I-94 highway system. I started in the education business 21 years ago has a director of finance. Seven years ago I became the Superintendent of VBISD. We provide services to 12 local school systems ranging in size of approximately 27 students in a K-8 district to 3,800 K-12 students in Mattawan Consolidated School District. The area is very rural and encompasses 725 square miles, with two school systems located on Lake Michigan, Covert Public and South Haven Public Schools.

I am here today to provide you with my own clarifications on accepting a bill for “the right reasons” as you look at some of the details of Senate Bill 618.

A few weeks ago testimony was given to this committee regarding charter schools which have to follow the same rules and regulations as those of traditional public schools. I feel this statement needs to be clarified:

A charter school does not have a public election for board members. They are appointed by the authorizing agent. Traditional schools must have popular elections. If traditional schools had the ability to “appoint” board members maybe there would be less conflict and the potential to have “experts” on your board that are familiar with financial and human resource issues that seems to be the heart of the problems that school districts have been addressing the last few years.

A charter school has the ability to deny students to attend. This past fall we had a family move into one of our school systems who had 6 children. All of the students had some type of disability and in need of transportation services. In addition, all the students were in need of specialized services. One child has a full time nurse at the local school district where they attend.

If this family wanted to attend the charter school the charter school can deny them if their doors are full or were not accepting students. A traditional public school has to accept every student that enters their doors, no matter when, where, or what background the student comes from. I don't feel this plays into the "anytime, anyway, any place, any pace" theme that the governor was referring to in his educationally address last spring.

When a charter school closes where do these students go for education? In most cases they would end up in the traditional public school. Again they have to accept any and all students who enter their doors. What happens to a parent who pulls their student out of a traditional public school to home school their children?, I have had the first hand experience of sitting down with a parent in my office who wanted to home school one of their children because the mother was not happy with how the teacher was treating their student. They felt the teacher was being too strict. What happens after six months, one year, two years when this student wants to return to school? You guessed it, the traditional public school needs to accept this student and the charter school can deny if they are full or are not accepting students.

A majority of charter schools (over 70%) do not have to pay into the retirement system, thus saving at this time 24.46% of every dollar that is paid out in salaries.

A traditional public school by law has to pay this amount for almost every staff member working in the district. Again, is this a level playing field that charter schools have to follow all the rules and regulations of a traditional public school?

What is the concentration of charter schools in urban settings? Or of the 255 charter schools in Michigan 58 percent of them offer programs of 8th grade or lower. These students are the least expensive to educate. Because charter schools get the full foundation allowance from the state, how much money will be taken out of the school aid fund? There are many more examples that could be addressed regarding accountability requirements, transparency reporting, etc...

I hope that you see the many complexities of Senate Bill 618 and all of you will take the needed time to review data, hear from the colleagues who are on the front lines in traditional public schools and then make “the right decision” for the future education of Michigan’s most precious gifts – our children.