

Testimony to the House Education Committee – November 13, 2012

House Bill 6004 – Education Achievement Authority

Chris Greig
21031 Eastfarm Lane Ct
Northville, MI 48167
Chris_greig@msn.com
Parent in Farmington Public Schools

I am here today as a parent, taxpayer, citizen and volunteer. I am here to speak out against the astonishing overreach of authority of the state in expanding the mission of the Education Achievement Authority.

It is my understanding that House Bill 6004 provides for the EAA the means to takeover unused school buildings in our community and that the district is responsible for maintaining these buildings for the EAA and whomever it contracts with to set up a charter school. Furthermore HB6004 gives the governor and legislative leaders the authority to appoint the management of the EAA.

It is also my understanding that the EAA is in its first year of existence – focusing on low performing schools in Detroit. So if I have this right, this bill is designed to expand the authority of an institution that hasn't even completed one half of one school year. Where is the dashboard? Where is the data? How do these schools compare to what's already going on in traditional public schools? When, in any business, community or school district – is it a best practice – even a good practice- to expand a program that costs tens of millions of dollars – currently outside dollars along with taxpayer money – without having an evaluation period? Where is the accountability?

And when it is a best practice to completely ignore the reforms that have just been put in place? Why are we not collecting data on the reforms passed by this legislature such as Teacher Evaluations, benefit reform and other best practice to see the effects on learning? This legislation goes against everything I've heard the governor tout as innovative and best practice. I also recall hearing the governor emphatically declare that government is in the customer service business. Who is the customer? It certainly does not seem to be me – a mother of three boys.

Have you visited the public schools in Farmington? In Novi? In Bloomfield Hills? In Walled Lake? Do you not know that we have the best public schools anywhere? Our graduation rates are the highest they have ever been; we have more students taking advance placement than ever before.

My family for example – my oldest son was in parochial school for 1 year before we made the decision to enroll him in Farmington Public Schools. Alex is now a junior at the University of Michigan. He entered U-M with 17 credit hours from AP exams; Andy is one year behind Alex – he entered U-M with 20 credit hours. My son Bill is a sophomore at Farmington High School. He is in the Project Lead the Way STEM curriculum; he is a tuba player in the award winning marching band, and he is on the Farmington United Robotics team. I don't tell you this to brag about my kids – I tell you about my own

personal experience to illustrate what's happening all over our area. I have friends in many different districts and I hear the same thing – isn't it amazing the education our kids get compared to when we were in school? This year, one student from each of our three comprehensive high schools, earned perfect scores on the ACT. Here's another trend happening all over – residents, businesses, parents, teachers – are all coming together to make our public schools even stronger by building community – fellowship in the goal of educating every child to reach their full potential.

In addition to a PTA or PTSA in every school, Farmington alone has a Proud Dad's club, African American Parent Network, Multicultural Parent Group, Grandparent/Guardian Group, Special Education Parent Group, Together for Accelerated Learners group, Music Patrons and Senior Adults Giving to Education or SAGE. The goal of each of these groups is to engage families at a level that is meaningful to them. Once engaged and invested in the education of our children, we work better together to keep our community strong. Where does this go when you bring in remote governance – who doesn't know my child or my community?

If you're looking for innovation in our schools n- all you have to do is visit Farmington Public Schools. I am personally inviting you to our schools. I have been volunteering in the classrooms and with groups for more than 15 years. We are constantly evaluating and adding new programs and resources to help every child. And we do this by working together – by building on the good – by bringing in new partners from business, community and beyond - not by tearing apart our very community.

Let me leave you with two points:

This bill opens the door to for-profit corporations to take over the education of our children. What happens when an industry becomes 100% market driven? You have winners and losers. Think about that – winners and losers in the development of our most precious resource – our children. Public Education is just that – we serve all children – no matter at what capability level they are currently at. We serve the struggling learners, the poor, the rich, the disabled, the advanced learner, the newly arrived to our country. Public Education's mission is to prepare all children to be productive citizens in a global world. It is not to make a profit. It is an investment in our country, our state, our communities, our families. It is a product of the Common Good we teach our children so much about.

Finally, the Education of our children is too important to ram through bills with massive overreach that will change the face of public education. And to expedite this "discussion" during a lame duck session is incomprehensible. Where is the public discourse? Where are the truly open discussions that include all stakeholders? If you just look at the election one week ago – you have got to get the message that the people of Michigan do not like overreach by the state – or by any group. We do not want our Constitution changed and we do not want Emergency Manager control of our cities and schools. You have an obligation to give the current reforms a chance to perform. You have the obligation to go out and meet the stakeholders across the state; you have the obligation to explain new ideas – whether it be the EAA, Parent Trigger Legislation, or School Aid funding. A lame duck session is not appropriate for the gravity of what you're attempting to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my opinions today.