

Southfield Public Schools
24661 Lahser Road
Southfield, Michigan 48033
Nov. 19, 2012

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am the VP of Southfield School Public Schools Board of Education. Southfield is a district of approximately 8,000 students. Ninety-two percent are African American and 22 languages are spoken in our schools. Thirty percent of our students live in apartment complexes and 60% receive free and reduced lunch. We have a robust pre-school, University High School, and International Baccalaureate (IB) program, including Pre-IB for K-8. We have business, engineering, arts and medical academies and we partner with Providence Hospital, Southfield businesses and major universities. Our graduation rate is 89% and our Superintendent was just named Superintendent of the Year by the Michigan Association of School Administrators. Our alternative school was named the best in the State by the Michigan Association of Alternative Schools. Our professional development program was recognized nationally for its quality. Our graduating students last year brought in \$11 million dollars in scholarships. In spite of the quality of our education, leadership and staff, our teachers and administrators gave up six percent of their salaries the last two years in a row in order to help us balance our budget. You can tell that Southfield is doing very well under adverse conditions, namely the reduction of funds from the State of Michigan.

House Bill 6004 is part of a package of bills that will seriously change the way public schools are governed in Michigan and they will seriously and negatively impact our already financially crippled schools. It was supposedly written to help those schools in the bottom 5% of achievement. It will really negatively impact the 95% of Michigan schools that are doing well.

This package of bills is based on the false assumption that Michigan's schools do not serve the students of Michigan. I recently attended the annual conference of the Michigan Association of School Boards, attended by 600 of Michigan's school board members and school superintendents. After listening to the awards, attending classes and hearing about the good things happening in Michigan I believe that the education of our children is in good hands in spite of the State's raiding of the school aid fund to pay for charter schools and for profit educational management companies.

In addition to having a superior staff and administration, Southfield buildings and programs are kept in tiptop condition to help prepare our students for the 21st century. This takes a great deal of money. We in Southfield are optimistic that the economy of Michigan will improve when the world discovers that most of Michigan's public school districts provide outstanding education, and Michigan has water. Southfield Public Schools already shows a reduction of our projected decline by 266 students this year.

House Bill 6004 mandates that every school district notify the MDE when a building previously used for instruction has become closed, unused or unoccupied and requires that the district maintain the building in a condition suitable for use as a school building. If a charter school or the EAA (Education Achievement Authority) decides they want to use the building then the district must sell or lease the building at fair market value to the charter or EAA. The charter or EAA may take schools including, but not limited to, those in the bottom 5%. The EAA will have power over their schools equal to and separate from the elected State Board of Education, including the direct receipt of federal funds. It becomes a parallel department of education in spite of violating the Michigan Constitution which gives oversight of all Michigan public education to the elected State Board of Education. The bill also allows the EAA to engage private and nonprofit entities to conduct its education programs.

Our buildings are vacant due to the downturn in Michigan's economy and through no fault of the district. If the state would focus on turning the economy around the buildings would not be vacant. That is their responsibility; educating the children is ours.

If House Bill 5923 Selective Enrollment and New Forms of Schools passes, the new EAA school district will be empowered to open schools anywhere in Michigan without oversight by any government agency, including the MDE and the elected State Board of Education.

What we are witnessing is a strong grab for the dollars that are sent to the state by our school districts and are intended for the education of our children. Charter schools, authorizers and for profit management companies have a conflict of interest where funding is concerned. They each collect three percent of their school aid, but the authorizers are the only ones who have the power to close their schools!

I ask you again to do the right thing.

Give oversight power of all public schools to the elected officials of this state, the State Board of Education.

Stop diluting the funds needed to educate our children and let the school boards and superintendents do their job.

Pay attention: The EAA will not participate in any standardized testing and therefore, may not receive any federal funding.

This bill has no ties to quality control or expectations of student performance.

Do not pass HB 6004- even the chancellor does not know how the EAA schools will be funded and what will happen if a school "fails." HB 6004 is not well thought out and should not be passed.