

February 24, 2016

Dear Honorable Members of Michigan's House Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kevin Casillas, a resident of Lincoln Park, Michigan. I write today to voice my *opposition* to HB 5382-5387. I currently serve as Pastor of First Latin American Baptist Church in Southwest Detroit, an Evangelical, bilingual congregation that has ministered in Detroit since 1930. I also teach at DPS' Cass Technical High School. Like many of my teacher colleagues, I work two jobs to try to provide for my family. I have a ten-month old and a three-year old.

Yesterday in an editorial in the *Detroit News*, Betsy DeVos of the Great Lakes Education Project stated that as you here in Lansing "debate whether Michigan taxpayers should fund a \$715 million bailout of the Detroit Public Schools, we must acknowledge the simple fact that DPS has failed academically and financially – for decades." She then proceeds to argue for a totally new district, more charter schools and the proposals found in this package of bills.

I allude to the article as an example of the confusing statements that are made to justify the type of actions presented in HB 5382-5387. In fact, you may hear some of this language in today's hearing. DPS' debt must be resolved, and it must be resolved immediately. But please understand this is not a "bailout" of Detroit Public Schools because of how DPS has failed academically and financially. The "bailout" is to pay for the results of misguided decisions made by State-appointed Emergency Managers and CEO's going back to the days of Gov. Engler.

House Bills 5382-5387 take the financial and academic mess left by State-appointed directors as an opportunity to shoe-horn the wish list of the charter-school lobby. As you know the Great Lakes Education Project along

with other similar groups, have been very generous to the Republican House Campaign Committee of Michigan and individual Legislators. One wonders if indeed the bills are putting Detroit children first or someone else.

1. How is it putting Detroit children first when their parents are not allowed to keep their schools accountable to the local community through an empowered elected school board?
2. How is it putting Detroit children first when they have to be subject to eight more years of State oversight and control? This is more of what has caused the problem, not a solution to it.
3. How is it putting Detroit children first when once again students will be the guinea pigs of charter school experiments and so called "school reform" pilot programs? The bills do not call for an entity to keep the charter schools accountable to the local community.
4. How is it putting Detroit children first when college students and professionals through a type of "educational amnesty" get to bypass the rigor and time required by Michigan's current certification system to have access to Detroit kids?
5. How is it putting Detroit children first when their veteran, highly-qualified teachers who have endured so many sacrifices during the chaos of State-management are vilified and punished for whistleblowing the effect Lansing decisions have had on the kids?

This package of bills is an offense to the families and children of Detroit. Many of you would not want the provisions to apply to your own districts. Why would you want them just to apply to Detroit families? Please reject these bills and work in a bipartisan way with your colleagues on the other

side of the aisle. If there is anyone who knows more about what would better serve the kids of Detroit, it would be those who represent them, those who are parents of them and those who have taught them. Please listen to Rep. Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, Rep. Brian Banks, Rep. Leslie Love, Rep. Stephanie Chang, Rep. Harvey Santana among others. Please work with you own colleagues in the Senate like Sen. Geoff Hansen who is seeking a solution that works best for the people of Detroit.

After years of control by State-appointed Emergency Managers and CEO's, DPS will once again run out of money in April. The teachers are not the ones to blame. We have made significant sacrifices as a part of the EM's schemes to balance the books. It is time to hold your EM laws accountable for the chaos they have left in DPS. It is time to resolve the debt and send the urgent funds needed for the education of students at DPS. This package of bills is the wrong approach.

As a Pastor I urge you to reflect on the fact that one day you will give an account for the choices you make or postpone because of special interests and appeasement of wealthy donors at the expense of the wellbeing of children in poorer communities. Consider the words of Proverbs 21:13, and Proverbs 22:16 and reject HB 5382-5387:

“Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. . . Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.”

Thank you,

Kevin Casillas

Lincoln Park, MI