

Testimony against SB 1538

My name is Don Crawford. I am a long-time educator having been a special education teacher, university professor of Special Education, a charter school principal and the Executive Director of a set of charter schools here in Oregon—and an education speaker for U-Choose. After looking closely at the text of SB 1538 I am testifying against the bill. It is a thinly veiled attempt to limit the growth of charter schools to mere tokenism. Many parents, possibly a majority, want the kind of educational options provided by charter schools.

Parents freely choose charter schools. Long waiting lists at all the existing charter schools demonstrate pent-up demand for charter schools. Charter schools operate on fewer tax dollars than traditional district-run schools. Parents whose children attend charter schools are much happier with the education they are getting. Why then support legislation that would limit a good thing that parents want? It is arrogant and dismissive of parents to limit charter schools to serving only 3% of the children, when pent-up parental demand, in the form of long waiting lists, shows that more charter schools are wanted.

As for a charter school needing to meet “goals” established by the school district, that is neither fair nor honest. It is not fair because the “goals” being created by the school district are not goals which the district is currently achieving. Anything that the district is currently achieving could be met by the current law just as it is written. It is not honest, because these are goals that would be invented by the school board without regard to their feasibility. It is easy to make up goals; it is far harder to achieve them. For example, school boards might want charter schools to serve the poor and raise their test scores up to average—something that the district teaching staff cannot do—so it is not a “fair” goal. Charter schools must by law take all applicants so they have no way to focus their services on the “poor”—so the goal is not honest. But by putting this lofty sounding goal in place, no one’s application for a charter school would even have to be considered.

Charter schools and school choice can work to give us something like a free market in education. The free market gives us variety, choice, abundance and competition wherever it operates. This is what we need in schools—variety, choice, abundance, and competition. We need legislation that promotes charter schools to meet the demands of parents, not legislation that attempts, in a devious manner, to restrict the natural growth of charter schools.

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