

— LEGISLATIVE —
TESTIMONY

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MICHAEL VAN BEEK

**Lawmakers Shouldn't
Discriminate Against
Charter Schools With
Unfair Regulations**

Senate Education Committee

Opposition to Senate Bills 943-947

Madame Chair, committee members: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Michael Van Beek, and I'm the director of research at the Mackinac Center.

If you respect the choice hundreds of thousands of parents in Michigan have made to enroll their children in public charter schools, you should reject this package of bills.

Thirty years ago, your predecessors created Michigan's charter school law. Parents at the time were frustrated with persistently low-performing public schools, a feeling they perhaps share with many parents today. Families who were wealthy enough to afford private schools always had alternatives, but what about families who can't afford tuition? They deserve options, too.

Lawmakers then faced an important question in crafting the charter school law: Should they subject these new, independent public schools to the same standards and accountability as traditional public schools or create different rules and regulations especially for them? Your predecessors chose wisely and decided to treat all public schools the same. Since then, Michigan has maintained fair and equal standards for both charter schools and district-run schools.

These proposed bills would upend our fair and equal standards for public schools.

Senate Bill 947 is especially problematic. It would outlaw a relatively common practice of charter schools: leasing and renting school buildings. Charters, unlike school districts, have no means to raise special revenue for school buildings. So, many of them rent instead. This bill would jeopardize the viability of these schools.

In fact, two such charter schools were just named among Michigan's 12 best public schools and awarded a National Blue Ribbon from the U.S. Department of Education.

The hard truth about this legislation is that it will limit the options available to Michigan parents.

That's the hard truth. The sad truth about this legislation is that it has nothing to do with improving public schools. Instead, this is about limiting the competition school districts face from charter schools. That's why these onerous regulations only apply to charters. And that's why these bills are being heard today despite there being no evidence — just anecdotes and conjecture — that there's a systematic problem with how charter schools operate.

School districts would benefit if these mandates were forced on charter schools but not them. This is about rigging the rules of the level playing field Michigan maintained over the last 30 years. School districts might not like that level playing field, but Michigan parents do.

Committee members, you should reject these bills. We need to preserve educational choices for Michigan families and keep our fair and equal standards for all public schools.

Michael Van Beek

Director of Research

Mackinac Center for Public Policy

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140 West Main Street P.O. Box 568 Midland, Michigan 48640

989-631-0900 Mackinac.org mcpp@mackinac.org