

DC Council Committee on Education Hearing on B21-777: Planning Actively for
Comprehensive Education Facilities Amendment Act of 2016; Monday, July 11, 2016
Testimony, Mary Filardo 21st Century School Fund

I am here to speak in support of one particular provision in the bill - - Nancy Huvendick has addressed the others in her testimony - - and to encourage the Council to add a provision which is very absent.

I encourage the Council to retain the requirement that every charter LEA report on the utilization and conditions of each of their schools or face penalties regarding their facilities funding.

Since charter schools were first authorized in DC, the District government has appropriated over \$1 billion to charter LEAs in the facilities allowance. In the next 6 years (the capital budget period) with the facilities allowance unchanged—and assuming the same number of charter students as 2014-15 (which is a low estimate) the District is positioned to provide another nearly \$720 billion in facilities allowance.

A number of charters, the association of operators, and FOCUS are advocating the need for a higher facilities allowance. But how would anyone know if charters needed a higher facilities allowance or not? What condition are the schools in? Are they adequate? According to what standard? Are they fully utilized? Are they actually using all of their facilities allowance for their facilities?

The Council will not be able to decide on important elements in the Educational Facilities Master Plan, or to represent the public interest in its decisions about charter facilities funding without accurate, comprehensive facilities data and information. Without a requirement and consequences, charters are unlikely to comply.

The other item I want to speak to is an aspect of the bill which is missing—which is a standing civic committee that advises the Chancellor, Deputy Mayor, and Charter School Board on the educational facilities master plan, the CIP, and the facilities allowance. Capital plans and budgets require a specific focus and knowledge that is not readily at hand to the Chancellor, Deputy Mayor, the Charter Board and to most Council members and so the capital process and its implications are neglected—something documented in the latest DC audit on Ellington, which showed the problems extended to an entire portfolio of projects.

A facilities advisory committee would help the council and mayor ensure adequacy and equity and more fully understand and vet projects before they come off and on the CIP. Broad public engagement is critical, but having a standing committee through which competing interests are mediated is important because there are often no right answers

I have attached to my testimony examples of facilities advisory committees—one for Chicago Public Schools; one for Fairfax County Public Schools; and the School Modernization Financing Act of 2006, which includes the language for the DCPS Modernization Advisory Committee. I

encourage the Council to integrate a citizen committee into these improvements to the educational facilities master and capital planning processes.