

**Testimony as Prepared for Senate Education Committee Hearing
Thursday, January 22, 2015**

Mr. Chair and Members,

My name is Eugene Piccolo, Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

Thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts and express our support for SF 76.

First, as you know charter schools are required to meet all federal, state and local health and safety laws that apply to traditional public school districts – and we support that all public schools need to meet health and safety requirements.

However, charter schools do not have access to health and safety revenue to meet those requirements which means the compliance costs for all those health and safety requirements comes out of general revenue –leaving less funding for teaching and learning.

Second, the use of general revenue to address compliance with health and safety costs has been exasperated over time as the state has shifted education costs to local property taxes over the last decade, which has led to a growing disparity between school funding for public school students who attend chartered public schools and traditional school districts.

Last year, there was a national study that looked at funding in each state that found that there was significant growth in the disparity of funding for students who attend charter public schools and traditional public schools in Minnesota.

This growing disparity just adds to the fact that charter schools do not currently have the equivalent means to address health and safety needs and requirements.

So, we appreciate that SF.76 seeks to begin to address the funding equity gap by providing charter schools with long-term facilities maintenance aid, as well as providing, the flexibility to utilize those funds in a way that makes most sense for the school to address health and safety issues and other needs of students.

I would be remiss, Mr. Chair and members in a discussion related to facilities, if I did not ask the committee again to address the current prohibition of charter schools directly owning buildings and creating a state bonding authority to issue revenue bonds for charter school facilities.

We know that allowing qualified schools (and not every school would qualify) to directly own a school building, as well as creating a state bonding authority to issue revenue bonds will reduce costs for individual schools, as well as the citizens of Minnesota.

Finally, we do appreciate the efforts of Senator Dahle, Houseley, Kent, Stumpf and you Mr. Chair to provide more equitable funding for chartered public schools with the establishment of a long-term facilities maintenance revenue program.