

To: Members of the Kirwan Commission

From: Melissa Riccobono

Chairperson, Advocacy Committee, Patterson Park Public Charter School, Baltimore

I am a parent of 3 children in grades 6, 3, and 1 at Patterson Park Public Charter School.

I want to encourage the Kirwin commission to include fair and consistent funding for charter schools in their recommendations to the state. The funding for charters needs to be part of COMAR because a reliable and regimented funding formula is essential for year- to-year planning and for the long term success of charter schools. **The consistency that will result from codifying the charter formula is absolutely essential for school stability. Our students should not be part of the yearly political games that have been played in years past. Charter schools take academic risks that offer creative and valuable education to our children; these schools should NOT be forced to take financial risks.**

As part of offering public charter schools fair treatment, the Kirwin commission should also increase the equity that is part of funding charters. For example, in Baltimore City there is a 2% administrative fee that is charged to charters. For the upcoming year, that fee was moved up in the lines of the budget, effectively costing charters more. Yet the services will not be increased. Such inconsistencies are harming charter schools and offering no benefits for students. The Kirwin commission needs to address these problems and even out such discrepancies.

Charter schools are an essential part of Baltimore City Schools. Charter schools often have attendance rates well above traditional schools. At PPPCS, this rate is well over 90%. Such a figure demonstrates the community and family support charter schools across this city have. The academic strength and supportive environment at Patterson Park Public Charter School help me, as a parent, feel that my child is safe; he/she is being supported, challenged, and nurtured as a whole person.

Charter schools are growing throughout the city, while traditional school populations are not. The innovation and academic risks charters bring are positive, rigorous, and educationally valuable for the city as a whole. Charter schools such as Baltimore Montessori have wait lists of over 1000. Patterson Park Public Charter School, which has a population of over 600, has a wait list that is also over 600. Our school could double without a wait list; something no traditional school in the city can say (even taking into consideration that zone schools, by definition, must serve any child who lives in the area).

Clearly, charter schools are valued by parents all over the city who want good and strong educational institutions for our children. And, once our children get that “golden ticket” into a charter school, we send them every day; we keep them engaged in their education; we, along with their teachers and administrators, work to make sure that the amazing opportunity of attending a great charter school is not wasted. The future of our city is stronger because of the growth and innovation of charters.

As a parent of an advanced learner, and two blind children who need specialized services, Patterson Park Public Charter School gave my husband and me the option to remain in the city, and yet provide our children with the type of challenges and services they need. Charter schools are vital to the success of public education in the lives of my children and for Baltimore City public education overall. If charter schools continue to suffer budget shortfalls, the impact on the city education system and on the economy of the city will become real and profound as families seek alternative schools and/or alternative homes. Please help to remove political variables and financial risks by helping charter schools receive funding that is equitable, fair, and reliable.

Thank you for your support on these matters.