



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
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Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Calling on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to adopt House Bill 526, ending the use of taxpayer funds to pay for cyber charter education when local school districts offer their own full-time cyber school programs.

WHEREAS, In the 2018-19 school year, 6,224 students from the School District of Philadelphia attended cyber charter schools. Additionally, enrollment in cyber charter schools across Pennsylvania is currently surging, with over 62,000 students enrolled statewide this fall, representing over a 60% increase from the prior year; and

WHEREAS, As of October 1, 2020, cyber charter enrollment in Philadelphia has increased by over 1,220 students, representing an increase of approximately 20% over the past year; and

WHEREAS, Cyber charter schools are publicly funded and receive tuition payments from each student's school district of residence; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia paid \$106 million to cyber charter schools in the 2018-19 school year - \$68 million in cyber charter school tuition payments for regular education students and \$38 million for special education students. The increase in cyber charter enrollment is expected to cost the district \$15 million, according to the School District of Philadelphia's Chief Financial Officer; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia spends about \$10,100 per regular education student and \$28,900 per special education student in charter school tuition annually; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania's Charter School Law requires the School District of Philadelphia and the other school districts in the state to pay the same amount of tuition for cyber charter students as they do for students attending brick-and-mortar charters. As such, each district pays a cyber charter tuition rate based on a school district's average expenditure per student excluding certain costs for services not provided by charters; and

WHEREAS, Tuition payments are not calculated based on the actual cost a cyber charter school incurs to educate students, but on what it costs a school district to educate their students in their own facilities; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Education has consistently identified Pennsylvania's cyber charter schools among the lowest-performing schools in the state; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, CREDO, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University, found "overwhelmingly negative results from online charter schools," noting that students attending Pennsylvania's cyber charters receive an education equivalent to 106 less days of learning in language arts and 118 less days of learning in math when compared to school district peers; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia offers a full-time cyber education program, Philadelphia Virtual Academy, that is aligned with the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Common Core standards and taught by state-certified teachers, and a virtual learning option is currently available to all students; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia has distributed free computers to students in need of a device; and

WHEREAS, Mandating local school districts to pay for failing state-authorized cyber charter schools when the School District of Philadelphia offers a full-time cyber education program is unnecessary and places an unreasonable financial burden on the School District of Philadelphia and local taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, The bipartisan House Bill 526, introduced by Representative Curtis G. Sonney, ensures that students may enroll in a full-time cyber education program offered by their school district without paying tuition or being charged fees other than what any other student in the district would pay; and

WHEREAS, House Bill 526 requires parents or guardians living in a district that offers a full-time cyber education program to pay tuition and fees for their student if they enroll their students in a cyber charter school; and

WHEREAS, Cyber charter reform in Pennsylvania has not occurred in decades, despite significant flaws in Pennsylvania law and adoption of House Bill 526 would be a first step toward addressing long-standing complaints from school systems and easing the burden on local districts as well as taxpayers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Calls on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to adopt House Bill 526, ending the use of taxpayer funds to pay for cyber charter education when local school districts offer their own full-time cyber school programs.