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To: Chair Gopal, Vice Chair Turner and Members of the Senate Education  
Committee

From: Althea D. Ford, Vice President, Government Affairs

Date: December 16, 2024

Re: Testimony on the Charter School Program Act of 1995

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On behalf of our member companies that make the New Jersey Business & Industry Association the largest, most impactful statewide association representing New Jersey businesses, I thank you for the opportunity to offer our perspective on the Charter School Program Act of 1995.

It is imperative that New Jersey maintains a diverse ecosystem of schools that can be responsive to the needs of students and families and ensures access to diverse educational opportunities. Charter schools are an important part of the array of educational settings that can provide students and families with an experience that best meets their academic and social needs.

As taxpayers, businesses of all sizes make significant investments in the state's public education system. A well-educated workforce is a competitive workforce. By offering more and diverse educational options, opportunities for future innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders who represent the diversity of our state and drive our economy forward are created.

The charter school model incentivizes innovation through its offering of substantive alternatives to the execution and delivery of education than traditional public schools. This innovation creates healthy disruption and competition amongst schools and encourages greater efficiency within the education system, as all schools are incentivized to better adapt and respond to the community's educational demands. For example, through specialization, charter schools can become academic hubs for students with interests in the arts, STEM or career and technical education. This flexibility strengthens community partnerships with industry partners and provides increased student exposure to valuable career interests.

To ensure that the Legislature's intent and codified expectations of the Charter School Program Act are realized, the Department of Education should be given the appropriate resources and personnel to execute and enforce the

law. With proper enforcement, there can be a better determination of the effectiveness of the existing Act, as well as confidence that new or revised updates to the Act will be enforced.

Transparency concerning the distribution and use of public funds is important to ensure accountability. Accountability, and the criteria used to determine it, should be clear, measurable, and adequately communicated to stakeholders. Publicly posting charter school budgets, a recommendation offered by the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association, is a step in the right direction.

The state Department of Education recently published the 2024 New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) scores, which show academic gains in English Language Arts and math for students in public charter schools, and particularly notable gains for Black, Latino and economically disadvantaged students. It is important that recommended updates to the Charter School Program Act do not hamper the flexibility of these schools to successfully adapt and respond in ways that yield student growth and success.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [aford@njbias.org](mailto:aford@njbias.org).