

Representative Wilson and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 14-1204. I would like to have been in front of you personally today, but we have a bit of weather in northeastern Colorado this morning and even canceled our teacher professional development days with bad roads. I hope this testimony can be useful.

I would like to share my support for Representative Wilson's bill as amended: "22-2-117. Additional power – state board – waiver of requirements – rules." This amendment would give small rural school districts the waivers which are automatically given to charter schools. I strongly support the bill as amended because the Charter School Act is consistent with how rural schools operate, and the bill provides a more efficient means for schools to be innovative.

First, as I have reviewed the Legislative Declaration with the original Charter School Act, it is clear that the Charter School law is consistent with how small rural schools already operate.

*22-30.5-102 (1) (b) Education reform is in the best interests of the state in order to strengthen the performance of elementary and secondary public school pupils, that the best education decisions are made by those who know the students best and who are responsible for implementing the decisions, and, therefore, that educators and parents have a right and a responsibility to participate in the education institutions which serve them;*

*22-30.5-102 (1) (c) Different pupils learn differently and public school programs should be designed to fit the needs of individual pupils and that there are educators, citizens, and parents in Colorado who are willing and able to offer innovative programs, educational techniques, and environments but who lack a channel through which they can direct their innovative efforts.*

*22-30.5-102 (2) (c) To encourage diverse approaches to learning and education and the use of different, proven, or innovative teaching methods;*

*22-30.5-102 (2) (d) To allow the development of different and innovative forms of measuring pupil learning and achievement;*

*22-30.5-102 (2) (g) To encourage parental and community involvement with public schools;*

*22-30.5-102 (3) In authorizing charter schools, it is the intent of the general assembly to create a legitimate avenue for parents, teachers, and community members to take responsible risks and create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating all children within the public school system. The general assembly seeks to create an atmosphere in Colorado's public school system where research and development in developing different learning opportunities is actively pursued. As such, the provisions of this part 1 should be interpreted liberally to support the findings and goals of this section and to advance a renewed commitment by the state of Colorado to the mission, goals, and diversity of public education.*

Anyone who knows small rural schools can see how aligned the intent of the charter school law is with the everyday operations of small rural schools. Rural schools have always been innovative out of necessity and it has been proven even more during these trying times with the negative factor.

Small rural schools have teachers who are very influential in the educational programming. There are very few districts with master contracts or negotiations getting in the way. In fact, most rural schools rely on teachers to set educational programs because there are no directors or central office staff creating curriculum or planning professional development. It is often done directly with principals and teachers working together.

Rural schools have always had great parent involvement. There is no bureaucracy through which parents need to navigate. Parents in small rural districts know the teachers, principals, superintendent and board members by name, and often know where they live. This is what I refer to as the "real accountability" for rural schools. It is perfect for local innovation and the ideal situation for holding schools accountable.

Secondly, I support the bill and amendment in that this will provide small rural districts a much more efficient means of accessing the waivers. The current process of requesting waivers or to utilize the Innovation Schools Act or the existing Charter School laws is cumbersome and would require a significant amount of staff time. Rural Schools often have superintendents who serve as the principals too. Even in small rural districts with superintendents and principals, it is very rare to have any other administrative support and they are often taking on every day responsibilities of supervision or even transportation or facilities responsibilities. Providing automatic waivers for small rural schools that are Accredited would free up time having to create waiver applications and drive to Denver to present them to the State Board of Education.

In conclusion, I would ask for your support on HB 14-1204 as amended because it can provide administrative relief to small rural schools struggling to keep up with the reporting and demands in this tough environment. Please be assured that local communities in small rural school districts are very familiar with how the school operates and have direct access to those making the decisions. I know in our school district, the school is on the front page of the newspaper at least every other week. Small rural schools provide the optimum setting for innovation and for true local accountability. In these times where there is such high accountability on the outputs for schools, please support small rural schools with the flexibility on the inputs, and this bill goes a long way for that type of support.

Thank you.

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