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TO: FRIENDS OF CER
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JUNE 12, 1997

PENNSYLVANIA CHARTER LEGISLATION GETS GREEN LIGHT!

Pennsylvania, Colorado and North Carolina have proven that the widespread support for charter schools demands attention and action when education activists take hold of the legislative process. Meanwhile, improvements to Minnesota's charter law are tied up in the package's veto by the Governor, who promised to enact tax credits which were not part of the education package delivered to him on May 30th.

Pennsylvania: Early this morning, PA became the 27th state to pass charter legislation permitting an unlimited number of charter schools to be started, yet ties their existence to approval by the school board. A moratorium until 1999 denies charter groups an avenue for appeal. After its expiration however, proposals that are denied can appeal to the state charter board after collecting 2% or 1,000 district resident signatures - whichever is less.

It also requires 75% of the teachers in each charter be certified, but provides a blanket waiver from all regulations, excluding health, safety and discrimination. And finally, responding to pressure from school districts complaining they'd lose money, the bill provides for \$7.5 million over two years for "legitimate transition expenses" which, if approved by the Secretary, would enable districts to recoup some losses caused by children who choose a charter school.

The bill provides parents, teachers and civic-minded citizens with the ability to create new and diverse learning opportunities for children, and that's what this is all about.

PA's long-term attempts may have finally been realized, but it wasn't without obstacles caused by the education establishment. The PA School Boards Associations, PTA and the NEA-affiliate all worked overtime to prevent passage of a truly strong program that would allow and stimulate hundreds of independent, public charter schools.

North Carolina: The same forces succeeded here, where the House Education Committee voted to change the language of the 1996 law permitting five charters per year per district [with a cap of 100], to only permitting five charters per district. NC's large counties that already have five approved, won't be able to open those working hard in the wings for next year. They also passed a clause forbidding charters from borrowing money, therefore making start-up nearly impossible. Finally, the new bill - if enacted as passed by the committee - will require charters to comply with the budget and accounting regulations that the state treasurer requires of public schools. This allows NC's Department of Public Instruction more control, a move that began when the Department added an amendment allowing them to add regulations at their discretion to every charter contract - even after it was signed. The bill now moves to the Senate, where it is hoped that wisdom will prevail.

Colorado: Someone got to the Governor who, in turn, vetoed a bill increasing the share of funding charters now receive from 80% to 95%. "The governor had an opportunity to remove charter school students from their second-class status. Instead, he gave into pressure from the educational establishment and fell back to the statue quo," said Jim Griffin, director of the CO League of Charter Schools. And finally,

Minnesota: A package sent to Governor Carlson includes provisions allowing start-up funds, increased revenues to follow students, and provides lease aid for charter schools. However, legislators are still negotiating with the Governor, who supports charters but also promised an expanded choice package to help low- and middle-income families.

6-16-97 to LHD

06-11-97 PA Co, NC Charters [F]