

The Baltimore Teachers Union



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Dear Charter School Educators:

Recently you may have received a letter in your school mailbox asking you to support Gov. Larry Hogan's "charter school expansion" bill.

This radical bill is dangerous to educators and our students because:

- It promotes fast growth of charter schools, putting quantity ahead of quality;
- It strips our charter schools of public oversight and accountability;
- It achieves these ends by destroying all the protections, including union membership, that are built into our current law.

Our current law is the anchor of Baltimore's charter school success story. We must protect it. "It ain't broke. Don't fix it."

But Gov. Hogan's "replacement" law is now moving rapidly through our legislature. If each of us acts immediately, we can defeat it. Our legislators need to hear your classroom wisdom: our current law is working.

Here's the real story: Gov. Hogan's law would radically reorganize our successful Baltimore public charter schools into 31 separate, stand-alone schools run by outside charter school companies. Baltimore's local school board would no longer oversee these schools. A veil would drop over charter school budgets; the public would not be able to follow the money. The bill could also sever your children's access to district school resources.

And what about educators and support staff? This law puts your own jobs as charter school teachers and education support staff at risk. Here's how:

The bill contains a provision that invites charter school operators to claim their teachers and staff as employees of the charter school, *not* of the Baltimore school system and thus not automatically covered by the union contract. Your new boss – the charter operator – would determine whether you were allowed to retain the salary, benefits and protections of the BTU contract. If the charter operator decided to take employees out of the BTU contract (which seems to be the objective of Gov. Hogan's bill), all teachers and staff at that school would become at-will employees. The charter company could fire anyone for any, or no, reason.

The charter company could also hire anyone to teach – friends and family included – because Gov. Hogan's law eliminates the requirement that Baltimore public school teachers be certified. That's right – principals could hire uncertified teachers without our current vetting process.

One benefit of a union contract is that it protects our role as “first advocates” for the children in our classrooms. I am hearing deep concern from our special ed teachers – and speech, occupational, physical and vision therapists – who work across school boundaries with special needs children. How will they work with charter school kids who have been removed from the school district? Will those children have access to all the public resources they now have? Will each new charter school have the budget and commitment to care for children who need extra help? Or will these children be sent back to overburdened public schools?

We also believe our engaged families should know that a charter company’s operating fee – as much as 12 percent – is skimmed right off the top of the school budget. As parents and taxpayers, this should alarm all of us.

If you received a pro-charter expansion letter in your mailbox, you may ask, who is supporting Gov. Hogan’s destructive bill? First, these charter school lobbyists are funded by the Walton Foundation, an organization that fights *against* strong oversight of charter schools and *for* taxpayer-funded private school vouchers that divert money from your classrooms.

These lobbyists are waging a campaign to convince Maryland that our law is “the worst” in the nation. This is campaign double speak.

In fact, our charter schools rank among the best public schools in the nation, and we know it. We are *not* Michigan, Ohio, Philadelphia, D.C. or New Orleans where poor quality, mismanagement and outright fraud are finally surfacing after years of dysfunction. That dysfunction and wrong-doing was hidden by bad oversight – the kind found in Hogan’s law.


Gov. Hogan has inherited one of the nation’s top public school systems. Our education laws and values keep us at the top. Why is he now opening the door to uncertified teachers and profiteering from out-of-state national charter school businesses?

Gov. Hogan is a businessman – a real estate mogul – with little elective experience. He has declared Maryland “open for business”; the public education budget is an easy target. Also Gov. Hogan has not put children through public school and lacks hands-on familiarity with complex issues. In short, he is on a learning curve but we believe he is willing to learn. Perhaps we can help to school him.

I encourage you to find your state senator and three delegates at <http://1.usa.gov/1ABN1nU>. Urge your legislators: **Vote against Gov. Hogan’s destructive law, HB 486 / SB 595.** Tell your legislators: **Our students are doing very well under the current law. It’s not broken, please don’t fix it.**

Thank you for all that you do for our students and city.

In solidarity,


Marietta English, President
Baltimore Teachers Union