



March 11, 2009

Testimony of Lawrence F. Jones, Jr., President of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman. My name is Lawrence F. Jones, Jr., and I am testifying in my role as the President of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools (PCCS). PCCS is a representative organization comprised of 120 member schools in Pennsylvania. Collectively, our schools provide educational options for more than 70,000 students in our commonwealth. I am participating in today's hearing for the Scotland School for Veterans Children (SSVC) to provide information related to suggested proposals to utilize charter schools (cyber and brick & mortar) as an option for students who will be displaced if the Scotland school is shuttered. Like many in Pennsylvania, I was made aware of the proposed decision to close the Scotland School via news report. The report stated that between 70% and 80% of displaced students reside in Philadelphia and would be returning to Philadelphia schools. I was shocked to hear that charter schools were presented as another form of school choice for the parents and students from Scotland. It was clear to me and many charter operators that this contingency plan was seriously flawed.

As an ardent charter school supporter, I believe that Pennsylvania's charter schools provide viable educational options to parents throughout the commonwealth. I also believe that parents of the Scotland School may find excellent alternative schooling in Philadelphia's charter schools. However, none of the Scotland parents can be guaranteed enrollment in a Philadelphia brick & mortar charter school. Although legislation repealing enrollment caps in charter schools was recently passed in Pennsylvania, the School District of Philadelphia continues to enforce enrollment caps in charter schools. This has resulted in more than 20,000 students on waiting lists for Philadelphia charter schools. By law, any school with more applicants than enrollment spaces (virtually every charter in the city), must utilize a lottery to select students. At this late date, most schools waiting lists are heavy in each grade. Therefore, the parents of Scotland's students would have limited opportunity to enroll in brick & mortar charter schools if they were to begin the research and application process today. The option of enrolling in a cyber charter school still exists for Scotland's students; however parents would have to

ensure supervision during the day. It should also be noted that not every child thrives in a cyber setting. In short, while charter schools present a viable educational alternative, the current law and cap structure in Philadelphia makes ensuring enrollment for Scotland's displaced students an impossibility.

The charter school movement could provide viable alternatives to the Scotland School or the closing of the Scotland School, but additional time and potential changes to charter law would be necessary. Below are a few examples:

- A charter school could be created to serve students from the Scotland School. Current enrollment and preference regulations would make this difficult, though not impossible
- A residential charter school could be created. Again, this would take time to plan, create, and identify funding
- A partial cyber/brick and mortar experience could be created. However, state law and time constraints would still persist as impediments to such a course of action

In closing, the shuttering of any school creates hardship and problems for students, families, and the community. Providing a sound, equitable, comparable, and feasible educational option serves to ease the blow for all concerned. Utilizing charter schools for an option to the Scotland School would be a sound, equitable, and comparable option. However, due to current laws, regulations, and School District policies, charter schools are not a feasible option for Scotland's parents. If charters can be of any assistance in the future, I am certain PCCS and our members will be available for assistance and support. On behalf of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools and the families we serve, I thank you for your time and this opportunity to testify before the committee.