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Testimony of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau
Before the Legislature's
Joint Committee on Education

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Regarding: Docket No. 4474: An Act to Reform Education in Public Schools through the Creation of In-District Charter Schools with Pay-For-Performance.

We are at a point where bold, fundamental reform is needed in the Massachusetts public schools, especially for those schools in urban centers that are chronically underperforming. For that reason, the Research Bureau is in support of Docket No. 4474, An Act to Reform Education in Public Schools through the Creation of In-District Charter Schools with Pay-For-Performance.

The lack of any real significant progress by the state in addressing chronically underperforming schools in the cities demands a more ambitious approach to school reform which cannot be achieved by incremental change through collective bargaining contracts.

In Boston, 55 schools or 38 percent of all schools have been classified as underperforming and 20 of those schools have been underperforming for six consecutive years. Even so, the state has become more involved in only English High School in Boston which has become a Commonwealth Pilot School. We need a new program that can turn around more of the chronically underperforming schools at one time

Docket No. 4474 authorizes local school committees and superintendents to promote "rapid academic improvement" in chronically underperforming schools by transforming them into In-District Charter Schools. This action would be taken in consultation with the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Last week Governor Patrick proposed his own Readiness Acceleration school plan which includes in-district public schools with high degrees of flexibility and autonomy for underperforming schools. Both these bills will need to be evaluated together in determining final Legislative action later this year.

Some of the advantages of In-District Charter Schools as proposed in Docket No. 4474 are:

- In-District Charter Schools can be established administratively and, unlike Horace Mann Charter schools or Boston Pilot Schools, do not require the approval of the local teachers union. Given the actions of the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) to limit expansion of Charter and Pilot schools and to weaken the unique benefits of Pilot schools, this feature should be supported. Once the In-District Charter Schools are approved they can be organized by the BTU.
- The In-District Charter Schools work within the existing district structure and budget guidelines so that they will not generate a resource hardship on the Boston Public School System. For regular Charter Schools in Boston, the City's Cherry Sheet net local aid in FY10 is reduced by

\$51 million due to charter school assessments that follow the students attending Charter schools. The funding formula for Charter schools has been revised once but further modification is warranted.

- Docket No. 4474 meets a need in Boston for quality school options for Boston students and parents. There are 5,264 Boston students who will attend 24 charter schools this year and over 8,500 Boston students on charter school waiting lists. In-District Charter Schools would follow the district's student assignment policy and be equally accessible to special needs and English Language Learner students.
- This bill provides a local mechanism with local accountability initiated by the superintendent and school committee that can be implemented to turn around chronically underperforming schools before state intervention is applied.
- This bill does allow In-District Charter Schools to implement a pay for performance initiative specifically planned for each school. The performance pay would be offered to "teams of educators" recognizing that academic achievement is a collaborative effort and improved student performance should be recognized as such. Various versions rewarding educators for improved student performance have been initiated in school districts in cities such as Denver and Chicago.
- There is no limit to the number of In-District Charter Schools that can be created as is the case for regular Charter schools and Pilot schools. Even so, the expectation is the Menino Administration would utilize this initiative basically for the 20 chronically underperforming schools over a period of time.

It should be recognized that given the capacity demands on the local school district to implement the provisions of this bill, Docket No. 4474 may be more practical for large urban school districts like Boston than smaller school districts in Massachusetts.

Governor Patrick and Mayor Menino have submitted separate education reform plans authorizing fundamental change in how state and local government would achieve academic improvement in chronically underperforming schools. Both plans offer the opportunity for Massachusetts and Boston to secure significant financial support through competitive federal educational stimulus funding for innovative reform. Too much time has passed with just incremental change and too limiting results. Now is the time to support bold reform and the Research Bureau recommends that the Joint Committee on Education give serious consideration to the provisions of Docket No. 4474.