

**Testimony by Shelley Skinner**  
**Learning Community Charter School and The New Jersey Charter School Association**  
**before the Assembly Budget Committee**  
**March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Chairman Greenwald and members of the committee, I am Shelley Skinner, Director of Development at the Learning Community Charter School in Jersey City and a trustee of the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association.

Last week my colleagues at Learning Community were stunned to find that our school would receive substantial cuts in State aid for the 2009/2010 school year. Our school, like many other public charter schools were not afforded the same right given to traditional public school to be held harmless from budget reductions. Next school year a student at our school will receive \$8,930 compared to their friend down the street at the traditional Jersey City public school who will receive \$17,221. The \$8,930 is compared to the \$10,500 a student from our school received last year. That is \$1600 reduction in aid per child. That loss has significant ramifications for our school. Simply put it means cuts in our educational program, the program that has made us one of the best public schools in the State. That reduction means cutting staff

The State, quite rightly, has gone through great lengths to hold students across the state harmless from budget cuts despite the economic down turn. However, thousands of charter school students did not receive that same protection.

If you drill down even further into the story of these reductions you will discover that the vast majority of children affected are economically disadvantaged (they qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch program) and are minorities. These kids, I believe we agree are the ones who can least afford to receive a reduction in aide.

My colleague, Councilman Fulop, has just described to you the tremendous demand from thousands of families statewide who are clamoring to send their children to a charter school. Yet for a school like Learning Community who has stepped up to meet community need and increase enrollment we have been financially punished for it.

I come here today and ask you to hold all charter school students harmless.

Thank you.

Testimony By Jersey City Councilman and Learning Community Charter School Trustee Steven M Fulop

Assembly Education Committee – 3/26/09

Members of the Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the important issue of education in NJ and more specifically in urban areas of our state. I am here today speaking to you as a resident of Jersey City, as a board member for the Learning Community Charter School, as well as an elected member of the city council representing the largest portion of Jersey City from both a registered voter and population standpoint.

I think we can agree on several points including the importance of educational opportunities and that education choices are demonstrated in nearly every successful model of urban education. There is a mayor in NY who has stressed and demonstrated the importance of charter schools, the mayor of Chicago has done the same, the mayor of Washington D.C has done the same, and most importantly President Obama has mentioned charter schools in nearly every major policy speech on education he has given

Yet in NJ, our legislators are proposing school funding for charter schools that is not only misaligned with successful models elsewhere but it sends a clear message on the state's view of charter school education. While demand for quality charter schools in New Jersey has exploded, the state continues to put more and more difficult parameters for charter schools throwing obstacle upon obstacle in the way of providing a strong educational foundation for children in NJ. The Learning Community Charter School where I sit as a board member lost \$1,600 per student largely do to our enrollment growth. We finally can meet community demand for more seats but essentially have been

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punished for it. Punished for providing more Jersey City kids the opportunity for a quality education

This problem is beyond Jersey City though; there are 19,000 kids state wide in charter schools and 10,000 on waiting lists. In Jersey City alone over 11% of Jersey City students go to charter schools. At The Learning Community Charter School where I am a trustee the waiting list is over 450 kids even though the school currently only has 324 students. Yet charter schools in Jersey City have been cut 1034.63 per pupil.

This is an important issue to the future of the city and I am here today to ask the state, as you did last year, to please return the \$9 million dollars to the budget for charter schools so that all charter school children are not hurt targeted during these tough economic times.