

June 4, 2019

Good Morning Chairman Sonney, Chairman Roebuck, and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee. My name is Beth Jones, I am a Founder of Collegium Charter School, the current CFO for Insight PA Cyber Charter School, and a Founder of the Coatesville Charter School of Innovation which is still in the application phase. I serve as the Secretary on the Board of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools, which represents both brick-and-mortar and cyber charters across the Commonwealth, and will be testifying today on the group's behalf.

I would like to thank the Committee for holding a hearing on the important topic of compulsory school age, in an effort to gain a better understanding of how Pennsylvania's current law is impacting schools and students.

We are in favor of lowering the compulsory school age from 8 to 6 years old, and eliminating the ability of a 17-year-old to drop out of school without the permission of their parent or guardian.

Children need connections in an education community, and they need to graduate from high school. Our current compulsory education laws allow families to shelter children from an educational community until age 8 – an age by which most children have been receiving schooling for at least three full years – thus denying them opportunities to be educated. I strongly believe in the choice of families to educate their children in the method best suited for their children – traditional public schools, public charter schools, public cyber charters, private and parochial schools, or homeschooling. Children want to learn; they possess an innate curiosity to explore and grow. Our laws should not allow parents the choice to reject opportunities for their children to begin their education.

Our older students need the support of the law to demonstrate to them the critical importance of remaining in school and graduating from high school. We all recognize how difficult adult life is without a high school diploma, at a minimum. We can not continue to have a law on the books that permits a juvenile the opportunity to leave school before graduating – simply by

having this law we are essentially saying to teens – go ahead, leave school, it's ok. But we all know it is not.

By extending the upper age limit of compulsory education requirements, Pennsylvania's graduation rates will increase, and these students will be more capable of meeting the needs of 21st century employers and the prerequisites of post-secondary education.

Again, I thank the Committee for inviting the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools to participate in this morning's discussion on compulsory school age. The Coalition is committed in its mission to advocate for legislation and policies that positively impact Pennsylvania's schools, and the students and families they serve. Changing Pennsylvania's compulsory school age will position our young students for early educational success and ensures students remain in school until majority age, providing them opportunities to graduate and setting a path for greater career and lifetime earning potential.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.