

MASSACHUSETTS  
**HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL**

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**TESTIMONY**

**Statement before the Joint Committee on Education**

**In Support of:**

**HOUSE BILL 3928**

**AN ACT TO ALLOW FAIR ACCESS TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS**

**March 7, 2016**

**Mark J. Gallagher, Executive Vice President  
Massachusetts High Technology Council**

Thank you, Chairwoman Chang-Diaz, Chairwoman Peisch and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak today regarding House Bill 3928, an initiative petition that would strengthen public education in the Commonwealth and expand access to public charter schools. My name is Mark Gallagher and I am Executive Vice President for Public Policy and Communications at the Massachusetts High Technology Council.

The Mass. High Tech Council is the Commonwealth's oldest and only cross-sector association of CEO-level leaders of technology-focused organizations. The Council has a 37-year history of non-partisan advocacy in support of one overarching mission: To make Massachusetts the world's most attractive place in which to live and work, and in which to create, operate, and grow high technology businesses.

Today, you will hear from many civic leaders about the social impacts that flow from a public education system where unacceptable achievement gaps persist and where too many children remain trapped in underperforming schools and are denied meaningful choice of educational opportunity. The Massachusetts High Tech Council certainly shares those well-founded concerns.

We offer our testimony today to highlight and reinforce the particular impacts of the legislation before you on the expansion of our technology economy and, as importantly, the availability of economic opportunities for our fellow citizens.

Recently, the High Tech Council developed the Massachusetts Technology, Talent and Economic Reporting System or "MATTERS," a 50-state competitiveness dashboard freely available to all on our website. MATTERS allows anyone to access key talent, cost and economic data and to use that data to benchmark Massachusetts against any other state or group of states.

MATTERS data reveals a current technology workforce in Massachusetts that is quite strong. Among the 50 states, we have the highest percentage of bachelor's degrees in our workforce and one of the highest ratios of tech employment to total employment in the nation. But MATTERS' talent demand data shows that Massachusetts is one of the most difficult states in which to hire technology talent. That is indeed an ongoing and significant challenge for our local technology employers and a primary focus of the High Tech Council's efforts.

Today, we respectfully ask you to view these talent supply-demand dynamics through a different, but related, frame. One that is focused not only on the challenges it presents to employers but on the opportunities it presents for our citizens, including today's school age children. The growing demand for technology talent is creating an increasing level of opportunity for those who have the STEM and other career readiness skills to seize those opportunities.

The Massachusetts High Tech Council commends legislative leaders, including Speaker DeLeo and Senate President Rosenberg, for placing charter school expansion at the top of 2016 policy agenda and we remain committed to working with you and your colleagues to craft legislation that would expand public charter school opportunities for students and families in Massachusetts.

We are equally committed, however, to supporting the initiative petition before the committee today should the legislature decline to enact legislation that will significantly expand access to public charter schools.

Massachusetts's public charter schools are a highly-effective solution to one of America's deepest and most persistent challenges: the achievement gap between wealthy and economically-challenged students and public schools districts, a gap that is particularly prevalent among black and Hispanic students. We respectfully disagree with any contention that public charter schools, with a 20-year track record of success, are an "experiment" or problem to be "reformed."

Public charter schools make up just 4% of all public schools in Massachusetts and would continue to comprise just a small percentage under any of the expansion proposals currently under consideration. This small cohort of schools, however, has had an outsized positive impact on students, communities and the broader public education system, just as they were intended to do.

For more than 20 years, the Mass. High Tech Council has joined with other business groups and civic leaders to support policies and initiatives that will elevate the quality of our public school system and expand opportunities for parents and students in the Commonwealth. This year we are pleased to join with the Great Schools Massachusetts and Race to the Top coalitions in support of this important work. And we are heartened by recent public polls that show overwhelming support for charter schools from our fellow citizens.

In order to be responsive to the broad and intensifying call for the expansion of public charter schools, any legislation enacted by the General Court must include a meaningful and sustainable cap increase and must not negatively impact the success of existing charter schools. Like the initiative petition before the committee today, any legislation should:

- Include a meaningful and sustainable expansion of charter schools and charter school enrollment that is driven by demand and responsive to parent and student choices to pursue public charter school opportunities; and
- Avoid negative impacts to key fiscal and governance attributes that empower the success of charter public schools.

House Bill 3928 provides a well-designed mechanism for sustained, targeted improvement of all public schools and expansion of charter schools and their enrollment, which can meet the demand for charter school seats and provide educational leaders with additional tools to address challenges in underperforming schools and school districts.

Together we can make the hard decisions and do the difficult work necessary to provide ALL our children with a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education that prepares them for a lifetime of success and provide our economy with the talent-based fuel that powers it.

On behalf of the Mass High Tech Council, I thank you for your time and respectfully urge you to act favorably on the important public school improvement proposals before you today.