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House Education Committee
SB 224: Testimony in Support
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Education Committee.

I am Lisa Grover, Senior Director of State Advocacy and Support at the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools. Our mission is to lead public education to high levels of academic achievement by fostering a strong charter school movement. Our goal is not to have all public school students attend a public charter school. Rather, our vision is that every family can choose a public school that delivers an excellent education for their children. Public charter schools are not in opposition to district schools, in fact, they can be often quite complimentary.

So, what is a Charter School?

- A charter school is a public school that is granted more flexibility to innovate in exchange for a performance agreement. Public charter schools have a school-based governing board which is made up of community leaders, teachers, parents and business people. A charter school reports directly to the State Superintendent. Forty-six states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico and Guam have charter school laws. In each of these areas, a charter school is statutorily defined as a public school.

Minnesota passed the first public charter school law in 1991. Today, forty-six states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guma allow public charter schools and, in every state, they are defined as public schools. I would like to offer a brief snapshot of the National Charter School Movement.

- 3.8 million students attend a public charter school and there are 8,100 public charter schools across our nation.
- Rural charter schools make up 11% of charter schools and serve 10% of charter school students. That is 80,000 students currently attend a public charter school.

- Public charter schools have been around for more than 35 years, and North Dakota is one of only four states which do not currently allow for their creation.

There are a number of reasons I'm here today to support of this bill.

1. A high of accountability and transparency, from charter performance agreements and quality authorizing practices to the clear provisions for financial transparency and ensuring special education students receive full services and fair treatment. Every charter school works under a performance agreement with the state superintendent. Every charter school must meet or exceed state standards, attendance, and graduation rates. They take the same state assessments. Public charter schools must follow all state and federal special education laws like all other public schools in the state.
2. Student-Centered Law. What I mean is that families and students have a direct say in the kind of education that meets their children's interests and needs. Public charter schools have a different approach to public education. It is a "bottom's up" approach rather than a top-down approach. In some ways public charter schools are a return to the red schoolhouse. SB 2241 requires a local community to demonstrate support for a new public charter school. Simply put, if a community does not show support for the public charter school, it simply will not happen. This bill will allow communities the opportunity to begin conversations if they choose.
3. Rural Charter Schools – Positive Impact
 - More than 320,000 students attend 836 rural charter schools, or about 11%.
 - There are charter schools in rural areas around the country, but they are more prevalent in a few states. In ten states, more than 25% of charter school students are in rural charter schools: Alabama, Hawaii, Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, North Carolina, Oregon, Virginia,

and Wyoming. Hawaii has the largest number of rural charter schools, California, Texas, and Florida have the largest numbers of students in rural charter schools. And Hawaii has the highest proportion of public charter schools, at almost 30%.

- The four states that passed a new public charter school in the last ten years are rural states: Maine, Mississippi, Alabama, and West Virginia.
- I am a founder of one of the first rural charter schools in NM, now in its 20th year, and establishing our school brought the community together, especially once we opened the school. Today, it is a collaborative relationship between the two schools.

I've spent twenty five working in public education, as a teacher, public school founder, education advocate, and mom. I have seen many great public charter schools doing amazing things for students, often on a shoestring budget. We have yet to see a public school close because of a new charter school.

I encourage you to seriously consider enacting this legislation. It is highly accountable, transparent, and provides the right level of flexibility to do things differently. They will help accelerate the innovation already taking place here across the state.

Thank you and I am ready to help at any time.

1. New Research Finds Charter School Students Outpaced District School Peers in Reading and Math - National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

-Center for education outcomes at Stanford University released its third national charter school report, using verified data from each state's DOE. This report finds that from 2014-2019, school year, public charter school students outpaced their traditional public school peers in both reading and math learning gains. On average, in a year, charter school students had 16 days of additional learning in reading and six additional days of learning in math.