



*Thomas Jefferson*

## LEGISLATIVE POLICY BRIEF

### **HB 380/ Charter School Excellence & Accountability Act: Providing More Flexibility and Accountability**

#### **Issue:**

How does the state foster more successful innovation in education by encouraging parents and teachers to develop more ground-breaking charter schools?

#### **Background:**

Nearly 2700 charter schools serve 684,000 students in America – mostly high poverty kids at risk of educational collapse. Independent studies have shown that these students, with a failing history in one-size-fits-all public schools, often thrive in such alternative schools. Here in Virginia only eight such schools serve 685 students – with thousands of children remaining at risk of failure. A key reason is the inflexibility of the charter authorization process: No Virginia charters were approved in 2002-2003, while four charter applications were rejected. Virginia's law is so restrictive it is a primary reason the state has lost \$7 million in federal funding.

#### **Key Bill Provisions:**

- Public charter school applicants may request a non-binding review of charter applications by the State Board of Education that would then provide expertise and render a passing or failing grade in the key areas of feasibility, curriculum, financial soundness and other criteria. The state Board shall not consider whether the application shall be approved by the local school board.
- Requires local School Boards to report the reasons for denying a charter school application, and requires the State Board to annually report to the General Assembly the number of schools approved, the number denied, and the reasons for any such denials.
- Increases the number of years for which a School Board may approve a charter school.
- Removes the limits imposed on the number and types of charter schools local School Boards may approve, while encouraging the establishment of schools for at-risk students, especially those students served by schools that have not achieved full accreditation.
- Makes it easier for to establish a public charter school at a Virginia college or university.

#### **Rationale:**

Charter schools addressing the diverse needs of different students are most likely to develop in states where flexibility is afforded. Having a charter school law with insurmountable barriers to forming charters has already cost Virginia \$7 million in badly-needed federal funds. Charter schools have helped thousands of struggling youngsters elsewhere in the country, and should be given a chance to work here in Virginia.

**Contact:** *Christian N. Braunlich*  
Vice President  
(703) 922-6768

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