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Governor Terry McAuliffe
Common Ground for Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor McAuliffe,

Legislation is now on your desk that would create new opportunities for children. SB 1283 is aimed at helping low-income black children receive a better education than they are now. As a matter of justice for those children, I ask you to sign this bill.

We have come a long way since the days when I was called to pastor at Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg and tried to integrate the libraries, public pools, and lunch counters in that city. It led me to serve as president for five years of the Petersburg NAACP and as state director of the Congress of Racial Equality. It eventually led me to become chief of staff to Dr. Martin Luther King.

The movement for justice taught me the importance of quality education. The Harlem congregation I later ministered chiefly served the children in a school district which had long been judged nonperforming and unable to produce students who were proficient in reading, math, and the sciences.

As I worked on other justice issues such as housing and unemployment, I was frustrated that I had no tools to better the school system that served the families of my congregation. I became convinced that quality education was the undeniable complement of the struggle that I had given my life to.

Virginia is in that same state of affairs. Local school districts here have long had the ability to seek out and create quality charter schools, or to band together to run regional charter schools. They have chosen not to do so. As a result 55 percent of Virginia's unaccredited schools are located in just five school districts. Just as some communities needed a "push" from higher authorities to do what was right in desegregating public schools 55 years ago, so too do the children in those schools today need a hand up from higher authorities in finding a better education.

This is what led me to dive into the charter school movement in the first place. In my most reflective moments, I believe this is where Dr. King would be if he were alive. Indeed, both his son and his niece are involved supporters of the charter movement.

Every American child is deserving of a quality public school education. It is education that will guarantee that segregation and second-class citizenship will never return, and I ask you to help provide that guarantee by signing SB 1283 to create regional charter school boards so that we can begin to throw a lifeline to the children we have left behind for far too long.

Sincerely,

Wyatt Tee Walker