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City Budget Fails to Adequately Fund Public Charter School Facilities

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This week, despite the advocacy of a broad coalition of parents, students, schools, and charter support organizations, DC Council failed to prioritize charter school facilities funding in the FY17 budget. Since 2008, facilities funding has increased only \$16 per student, failing to keep pace with both inflation and the ever-rising cost of construction. Washington, DC public charter schools, per student, receive about \$6,558 dollars less each year than their traditional public school counterparts.

Friends of Choice in Urban Public Schools (FOCUS) is deeply disappointed in the failure of the DC Council to recognize that 45% of students in the city attend public charter schools and are equally deserving of high-quality facilities as their traditional public school counterparts. This disparate pattern of funding forces charter school leaders to make difficult decisions between facilities and programming, and creates barriers to the growth of high quality schools that already have long waitlists.

As the advocacy organization for the charter school movement in the District, FOCUS is committed to advancing public policy that ensures the growth and replication of high-quality charter schools. In response to the failure of the Council, FOCUS offers the following policy recommendations, which will ensure that all students in Washington, DC have access to a safe, secure and well-funded school:

- The facilities allowance floor should be increased to \$3,250. This floor would enable the public charter school community, the lending community, construction companies, and other key stakeholders to operate with confidence that a fixed floor would be the lowest a facilities allowance would possibly be in any given year.
- The per pupil facilities funding level should be indexed to ensure that facilities funding keeps pace with inflation and is more predictable over time.

- Finally, the recommendations should then be codified to bring stability to a process that has all too often been governed more by political whims, rather than sound fiscal policy decisions based on actual costs and budgetary realities.

FOCUS promotes school reform in the District of Columbia in partnership with DC's public charter schools. As the principal advocate for DC's public charter schools since 1996 – when the first charter school was founded in the District, FOCUS is a constant presence at city hall, educating elected officials and policy makers about the strength of the charter schools and advocating for their most important needs: equal public funding; use of surplus public school buildings; and protecting the autonomy so vital to public charter school survival.