



**Testimony of
The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.**

**Before the New York State City Council Committee on Education
March 30, 2015**

Good afternoon, my name is Vanessa Ramos, Sr. Director for Policy of The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. (CHCF). I want to thank the Chair and members of the Education Committee for giving us the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of CHCF, I am here to express our support for 1) Res. 0583-2015, calling upon the New York State legislature to reject raising the cap on the number of charter schools; 2) Res 0577-2015, calling upon the DOE to amend the Parent's Bill of Rights to include information about opting out of high-stakes testing; and, 3) Res. 0592-2015, calling upon the New York legislature to implement the education funding for New York City pursuant to the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity vs. State of New York* case.

Since 1982, CHCF has combined education and advocacy to expand opportunities for children and families and strengthen the voice of the Latino community. Believing that the most effective way to support families is by building upon their strengths and fostering self-sufficiency, CHCF provides services through Youth Development programs, an Early Care & Education Institute, and policy and advocacy initiatives. CHCF's innovative model includes implementing culturally and linguistically competent programs to effect change, along with hiring and retaining bilingual and bicultural staff to implement direct service programs to the target communities.

I will address each Resolution separately:

- I. Resolution 0583-2015 calling upon the NYS legislature to reject any attempt to raise the cap on the number of charter schools.**

CHCF is not against charter schools—strong performance, educational opportunity, and parental choice for New York City families are welcome developments. But charters must be held accountable, must offer bilingual and dual language programs, and must provide transparency in their financial structures and remain subject to public scrutiny. Charters must also afford all students, particularly ELLs and students with special needs, equal opportunity in the enrollment process; their placement decisions and student retention records must be made available upon request and reported to the DOE. To our knowledge, there has been no comprehensive, independent evaluation of charter school operations. Our position is that charters must play by the same rules as public schools.

Charters are publicly funded but privately operated schools. The present cap for charters is 460 statewide of which 256 can be located in New York City. Currently, there are 197 charters operating in New York City. They use our public spaces and expand without paying rent. As of last year, our City has had to provide free space to all new or expanding charter schools by “co-locating” the charter in a public school building or by paying rent in private spaces at market-rate fees. Many of our public schools already lack space and resources as it is. Co-locations are burdensome, and add to the already overcrowded and deteriorating campuses. It is well-documented that most of our schools are near, at, or over-capacity. The report issued by the Independent Budget Office (IBO) in July 2014 found that 43.5% of students were attending schools that were at 102.5% of capacity or higher in the 2012-2013 school year.

If the cap on charters is raised once again, the City will have to spend millions in rent payments for charter schools in private spaces. Instead, those monies should be used to benefit more than 1 million children in the City’s public schools by improving the infrastructure, increasing the number of bilingual programs, and providing professional development opportunities to teachers and administrators. Even under the existing cap, the City will have to provide space for an additional 59 new charter schools as well as any existing charters wishing to expand. This is already creating an undue and onerous financial burden for the City.

II. Resolution 0577-2015 calling upon the DOE to amend its Parent’s Bill of Rights and responsibilities to include information about opting out of

high-stakes testing, and distributing this document at the beginning of every school year, every family, in every grade.

CHCF advocates for parental choice and believes that parents should be empowered to make informed decisions regarding the education of their children. Therefore, parents must have information, during each school year and in their home languages, about opting out of standardized tests and the possible consequences of opting-out. This information must also be made available to the Parent Coordinators in each school so that they can distribute whatever brochures or fliers are produced to parents in their home languages. Targeted efforts must be made to ensure all parents receive this information.

III. Resolution 0592-2015 calling upon the NYS legislature to fully implement education funding requirements for New York City resulting from the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York* case.

The *Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., et. al. v. State of New York, et. al.*, 8 NY3d 14 (2006) was a landmark case in which the Court of Appeals determined the State's constitutional obligation to provide essential resources and a “sound basic education” to **all public school children**, which includes English language learner (ELL) students and students with special needs.

After the decision, the State's funding increase for New York City was set at \$3.2 billion. However, according to the August 2014 report issued by the Alliance for Quality Education, New York City is currently owed more than \$2.5 billion by the State. In the meantime, our public school classrooms are overcrowded and significant cuts have been made to art, music, advanced placement courses, foreign languages, and staff, including guidance counselors, social workers, and librarians. We also have to confront the reality that NYC has the most segregated public schools in the country. All of these cuts have the greatest impact in low-income communities, students living below the poverty line, English language learners, and students with disabilities. According to a *New York Times* article, “True commitment to improving education in New York means confronting and proposing remedies for the racial and economic segregation that has gripped the

state's schools, as well as the inequality in school funding that prevents many poor districts from lifting their children up to state standards.”¹

The State has failed to meet its obligation to our public school children, still underfunding our schools and failing to pay back what it owes. In the report, “Gubernatorial Delinquency: Cuomo’s Failure to Fund New York City Public Schools”, published by the Alliance for Quality Education and the Public Policy and Education Fund of New York, it was established that \$2,667 is owed per student. This money can be used to create smaller classes, additional libraries, and more programs to benefit emergent bilinguals.

CHCF supports this resolution as a step toward ensuring that the human right to education is met, and having the State comply with its constitutional obligation.

Conclusion

CHCF believes that education is the vehicle that moves children and families out of poverty, and it must be prioritized as an investment. CHCF will continue to advocate for the educational rights of our children and their parents and families from early education through K-12 and beyond.

¹ New York Times Editorial Board. The Central Crisis in New York Education, (Jan. 4, 2015), retrieved 3/26/15 http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/opinion/the-central-crisis-in-new-york-education.html?_r=0