



*Join Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA) and Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) in Cosponsoring*

## **The Equitable Access to School Facilities Act**

### **What's the Problem?**

Demand for charter schools has skyrocketed over the last 20 years. Since 2003, charter school enrollment saw an increase of over 370 percent, rising from 700,000 to well past 3.3 million students. However, charter schools often face a lack of adequate facilities while more and more public school buildings sit unused. Recent Department of Education data indicate that more than 5,000 public schools closed across the country between 2017 and 2022. Charter schools and the students they serve deserve a fair shake at adequate places to learn and excel in.

### **The Solution: The Equitable Access to School Facilities Act**

The Equitable Access to School Facilities Act amends the federal Charter Schools Program to improve the quality and affordability of facilities available to charter schools. Specifically, this bill would create a flexible source of funding to States for building or purchasing charter school facilities and would help ensure charter schools' access to public property for their use.

Additionally, it trims red tape in existing Charter School Program statutes and funds technical assistance so states and schools can put bricks and mortar around growing demand. The bill also prioritizes States that prohibit preventing eligible charter schools from purchasing public property and States that provide charter schools with the first right of refusal to purchase surplus public property.

### **Key Provisions**

In making competitive grants, the Secretary will consider the extent to which the grant will:

- Improve the equity of charter schools' access to facilities funding and financing within a State, by reducing any gaps in funding between charter schools and other public schools;
- Promote charter schools' utilization of public buildings; and
- Increase charter schools' access to facilities of located in low-income and rural communities.

Additionally, priority will be given to States that:

- Provide charter schools with access to tax-exempt financing; or
- Ensure that land-use policies, such as policies regarding permits and fees, provide for fair treatment of charter schools.

Grants can be used to:

- Fund or finance the acquisition and renovation of facilities, including through partnerships with local educational agencies to provide access to public buildings;
- Cover ongoing facilities costs;
- Support the creation of local education property trusts to plan, develop, and manage facilities for charter schools;
- Create a reserve fund for future acquisition, renovation, or maintenance of charter school facilities; or
- Initiate a revolving loan fund for charter schools to more easily access construction capital.

The bill also:

- Prevents a federal interest in property purchased or used with grant funds; and
- Extends reporting for earlier credit-enhancement grantees to bolster accountability.