

This Charter Schools Bill arises, then, in the context of a national effort to stimulate and reward educational innovation not unlike America's effort to put men on the moon or, in an earlier period, to harness the power of the atom.

In such a context, it can be argued that policymakers should give innovators the widest possible latitude, the broadest possible freedom to invent. Breakthroughs require risk-taking, stretching the envelope of the possible, breaks with tradition, extraordinary tolerance for diverse perspectives and unusual, even uncomfortable, ideas.

This is, I believe, the spirit behind the Charter Schools Bill. The question you face is whether the law will be equal to its spirit.

In my opinion, this Bill represents a step in the ^{national} ~~right~~ direction. But it is a very timid step, considering what the occasion demands. The bill places the burden of proof that things can be done better, and the burden of extraordinary developmental time and energy, on the shoulders of the reformers. In times such as these, I believe the burden of proof should lie with those who want to continue doing business as usual.

In my opinion, the bill would be strengthened if applicants were freer to depart from traditional bureaucratic practices, traditional notions of equity and accountability and basic skills achievement. The bill's requirements for the contents of a charter application are unnecessarily detailed and not likely to stimulate any new thinking about how to create better schools. You need only ask yourselves if you would be willing to go through that amount of paperwork, with no extra resources and only a faint hope that your school board, with no incentives to do so, would approve the application. Only if applicants are encouraged to think freely will it be possible for them to invent better organizational practices, better approaches to equity, better forms of accountability, and better learning environments that take our young people far beyond mere basic skills achievement.

It may seem that to ask for more freedom from tradition is to ask for less accountability. This is not the case. The bureaucratic accountability suggested by this bill is only one kind, and we ought, by now, to see how limited it is, how much it constrains innovation.

If we are going to ask people to invent new and more powerful systems of learning, let us at least give them as much freedom at the start as we can. Then let us try to give them the resources and support they need to move ahead. *The current bill lacks*

~~Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.~~

Finally a number of features that might insure both the success of individual charter schools and to create the critical mass of reform necessary to impact the entire system.