

Senate Education Committee

Wednesday, February 07, 2024 - 3:00 P.M.

TESTIMONY ON: All Subjects

Written Testimony

Name (First & Last)	Subject	Manner Testifying	Representing Company/Organization	City	For / Against	Wish to Testify	District #
Keith Donahue	H 422	IP	Bluum, Inc.	Boise	For	Y	19

Chairman Lent and members of the committee.

For the record, I am Keith Donahue and I am speaking to you today in my role as the Director of School Strategy and Operations for the education non-profit Bluum. Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. Special thanks to the sponsors of HB422; Representative Boyle and Senator Den Hartog. Both have been long-time supporters and steady advocates for our public charter schools and for expanding parent choice across Idaho. Bluum's CEO, Terry Ryan regrets he is not able to be here this afternoon; I will do my best to represent Bluum in his absence.

I am here today to testify in support of HB422. In my role with Bluum, I have the opportunity to work with dozens of Idaho public charter school leaders to help support their ongoing efforts to improve learning opportunities for Idaho families and students. Over the last decade, in collaboration with the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation, Bluum has helped to facilitate the investment of \$73 million in Idaho's public schools while supporting the creation of over 16,000 new school seats across the Gem State. Given Bluum's focus and investments, we greatly appreciate this collaborative, thoughtful effort to strengthen and streamline Idaho's 25-year-old charter school law.

For example, HB422 provides additional flexibilities for schools, it rewards successful charter schools by allowing them to earn contracts of up to 12-years, and it reduces and tightens the language in code. These changes will not only strengthen our schools but also help the Idaho Public Charter School Commission better manage its growing and diversifying portfolio of 60 plus schools.

Having served as a charter school leader, and with my background as an attorney, I value clarity in statute and reduction in regulations. I also value the earned autonomy approach contained in HB422.

For these reasons, I support HB422. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would gladly take any questions you might have.

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Keith Donahue	<i>cont.</i>						19
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Margaret Dibble	H 422	W	self	Moscow, Idaho, USA	Against	N	6
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This bill would reduce the oversight and accountability of charter schools. If equal access by all students is not required, it would not be a public school. It seems that parents and teachers would actually have little to no control over the schools if they can be transferred among various private entities. A school controlled by private entities is not a public school. This bill would divert money from true public schools.

Tom LeClaire	H 422	IP	Coalition of Idaho Charter School Families	Meridian	For	Y	21
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Tom LeClaire and I am president of the Coalition of Charter School Families. The Coalition of Idaho Charter School Families is a grassroots organization of parents, students, teachers and administrators advocating for expanding school choice, providing equal funding, and ensuring public money follows the child to their family's school of choice. We trust parents!

We support House Bill 422.

Key highlights of the bill include:

- Introduction of new legislative intent language to support charter school development
- Streamlining the authorization and reauthorization processes for charter schools
- Establishing pilot charter schools
- Facilitating the replication of successful charter schools
- Providing a 12-year renewal term for high-performing charter schools

We support the new charter school law because it ...

- Strengthens and promotes successful charter schools across Idaho
- Encourages innovation in the classroom and new approaches to teaching
- Cuts red tape and allows charter schools to focus on teaching kids
- Gives parents more choices for their children

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Tom LeClaire	<i>cont.</i>						21
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Thank you for allowing to me to testify in support of this bill.

Kathy Dawes	H 422	W	self	Moscow	Against	N	6
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Chair Lent and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am very opposed to bill H 422 because 1) the bill proposes such sweeping changes that I don't believe have been vetted adequately by the public, and 2) the provisions in this bill contain sections that bother me a great deal. It would allow increasing the spread of charter schools by private, out-of-state interests. It would also allow an unlimited number of charter schools to be under a single entity that could be a "for-profit" service provider. It also takes away the rights of parents and teachers to approve the transfer of a charter from one private entity to another.

If this bill becomes law, it sounds to me like charter schools would no longer be considered "public" schools. Please vote NO on bill H 422. Thank you.

Margaret Dibble	H 422	W	self	Moscow	Against	N	6
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Fast proliferation of privately-operated charter school chains is not good for our public education system. Charter schools need more oversight and accountability not less. If equal access is not required it is not public school. If charter schools can be transferred among various private entities, how are they "public" schools? This bill would just weaken actual Idaho public schools and give our hard-earned money to out-of-state for-profit companies. In short, this is a really bad bill.

Blake Youde	H 422	IP	Idaho Charter School Network	Boise	For	Y	19
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Support H422

Name (First & Last)	Subject	Manner Testifying	Representing Company/Organization	City	For / Against	Wish to Testify	District #
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Diane Prorak	H 422	W	self	Moscow	Against	N	6
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I am against this bill because we could be working to support our public school system to offer more options instead of allowing private charter schools. This bill could allow a separate private charter school system, with possibly changing for-profit ownership, that has no stake or concern for the welfare of Idaho children. It would hurt our public school system, which we should be strengthening and it would not require the charter schools to offer the equal access of public schools. There is not enough accountability in this law for these schools and the legislature should be concerned with accountability and assessment. Thank you for accepting this testimony.

Vickie Fadness	H 422	T	Self	Lewiston	Against	Y	7
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I oppose H422

Moscow Charter School is a wonderful example of quality. They are independent, have clear academic and social goals, well-planned budgets, qualified teachers, inclusive and have proven to be sustainable. As a former board member of Latah County Community Foundation, I liked providing them with funding.

The reason I'm sharing their success story is because they followed and continue to follow the high standards set by previous legislators. This bill not only repeals the high standards set by current legislation, but sets in place very little oversight in staffing, curriculum, student achievement, or funding expectations. This bill turns public charter schools into either "cookie cutter" for-profit private schools or schools with very little oversight.

There may be some tweaking needed to refine the current requirements, but replacing them with this bill is not the way to go. Stay with high standards and expectations and vote NO on H422

Vickie Fadness
District 7

Robert Presta	H 422	W	Self	Sandpoint	Against	N	1
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Please vote NO on H 422. Like HB 415, H 422s intended audience is a constituent minority whose interests are not intended to benefit the general population. Also, this bill will degrade established oversight norms in regards to the use of public funds.

Lindy Swartz	H 422	W	Self	Sandpoint	Against	N	1
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I'm against this bill , it is unacceptable as a public education law. Fix our problems with our public schools that already exist and serve our children .

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Nancy Kee	H 422	W	Self	Sagle	Against	N	1
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This bill appears to be a convoluted way to proliferate religious schools at the expense of public education. We already have a number of good charter schools and the existing laws already support the establishment of more legitimate charter schools. Religious education belongs mostly in homes and churches, not in classrooms that are or may be controlled by private companies, or a few individuals, entities that may be unqualified and not concerned with legitimate educational objectives. This bill amounts to supporting extreme political and religious education with public monies, with the aim of indoctrinating children with the discriminatory politics of a few private individuals. The children in our state who attend charter schools deserve an education in all disciplines that is at least as good as is provided by our public schools, with appropriate curriculum governance.

Kathryn Larson	H 422	W	Riley Thinks	Sagle	Against	N	1
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I was studying under some of the early proponents of Charter Schools and had a front row seat to the excitement, implementation, and problems. And, like so many great ideas, public charter schools hold great promise. Execution on that promise remains elusive. The legislative intent documented in this bill is noble and right. Charter schools can be successful. My son taught at one that delivered great results and helped motivated students get college credits (free) while still in high school. And, there are more examples of charter schools that have failed to deliver on the promise.

This bill is written in such a way that those failures are almost certain.

In particular, the provision under Section 8 that allows the public charter school to contract with for-profit entities for comprehensive administration and management of the school. This seems rife with potential conflicts of interest and opportunities for abuse. The purpose of charter schools is to deliver to local needs. But allowing another for-profit entity to administer and manage our charter schools is absolutely counter to the stated legislative intent. This should be a disqualifying element for the bill.

Charter schools need to be locally generated, The need to fill a specific need within the community. Replicating a model in another community and plopping it down ready-made nearly always fail. Bringing in out of state entities and money to "accelerate" the charter schools is almost certain to erode our already challenged public school system. Holding schools accountable for educational excellence is difficult and can have the opposite effect. Yet, we need some accountability.

This bill needs a lot more work.

Please enter my statement into the public record

Name (First & Last)	Subject	Manner Testifying	Representing Company/Organization	City	For / Against	Wish to Testify	District #
John Harbuck	H 422	W	self	Sandpoint	Against	N	1

I oppose this expansion of the charter school system in Idaho. There are sections in the bill that "accelerate" charter school proliferation by private, out-of-state interests. This bill allows an unlimited number of charter schools to be placed under a single entity, which can act as a shell for a for-profit education service provider.

It allows private interests to give charter schools an unlimited amount of money. It also takes away parent and teacher approval before transferring a charter from one private entity to another.

Taken together, this bill allows outside interests to create a shadow statewide school district under the umbrella of just a few chartered school districts.

Along with bills like 447, this would greatly weaken Idaho's public school system.

Nancy Britton	H 422	W	s	Ponderay	Against	N	1
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This bill allows privatizing - through unaccountable for-profit, private, and out-of-state entities - of our public charter schools and creates a shadow statewide school system that will be as costly and undermining of our public schools as a voucher/ ESA / tax credit system.

This bill no longer uses "equal access" in the definition of "public charter school", meaning they can cherry-pick applicants, a distinctively anti-public school stance that shouldn't be funded by our limited public school funds. These schools already lack consistent public oversight and strong accountable governance, meaning we should be proposing strengthening these areas, not weakening it. Further, these charter schools already often share or infringe on public school spaces, reducing our already taxed and deteriorating infrastructure resources available to our public school children.

Until we fully fund our public schools by increasing per pupil spending and address the ageing infrastructure that undermines our public schools, we have no business expanding a fiscally uncontrollable and unaccountable charter system that does not have a proven record of increasing the quality of education for our children.

Please vote NO on H 422!

Name (First & Last)	Subject	Manner Testifying	Representing Company/Organization	City	For / Against	Wish to Testify	District #
Cate Huisman	H 422	W	Cate Huisman	Sandpoint	Against	N	1

Charter schools were originally envisioned to enable citizens to use public education dollars to create schools that provided different types of schooling options than their other local public schools provided. I was on a committee that worked for years to create one such school, the Sandpoint Charter School (now Forrest Bird Charter School). It has grown and flourished, and continues to provide an approach to schooling that works better for some students than the more traditional options offered by our other public schools.

Unlike our little community group, large corporations have taken the opportunity to try to make money with the charter school concept. They are driven by the desire for a profit for themselves and their shareholders, not to meet the needs of a particular community. Some of these schools have been successful in providing students with education options. Others have just made money for people outside the community. There's a reason the NAACP has called for a moratorium on charter school expansion.

This bill has provisions that make it easier for these outside interests to start charter schools. The phrase "equal access" is no longer included, leading to a concern that these schools would not be equally open to all students. It allows private interests to give unlimited funds to public charter schools of their choosing, leading to a concern that monied private interests will dictate what is taught. And it lessens public oversight of this whole shady shebang.

We need to stop giving inadequately monitored public school dollars to private, for-profit corporations, and to refocus on using this tool to empower communities to provide appropriate options for their students.

Vote NO on this bill.