

**TESTIMONY OF JAMES MERRIMAN  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE NEW YORK CITY CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER  
ON THE 2013-14 EXECUTIVE BUDGET  
SUBMITTED, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION**

My name is James Merriman, and I am the CEO of the New York City Charter School Center, (Charter Center), an independent non-profit organization that works to improve access to first-rate public education by supporting public charter schools at every stage of their development.

The following testimony is offered to members of the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee for their consideration. It is intended to provide our perspective on two critical public school-related initiatives proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in his 2013-14 Executive Budget.

**CHARTER SCHOOLS**

In 2011-12, the state budget implemented a two-year freeze on funding for public charter schools. As I testified at the time, and then again last year, the charter school community accepts the necessity of this policy in light of the fiscal challenges the state faces. As the economy improves in the coming year, and education aid continues to increase, we look forward to the opportunity to address the resource inequities facing charter schools.

The key source of this inequity is the continued lack of capital aid for public charter schools. This limitation forces public charter schools to fund capital costs with re-directed operating aid, a fundamentally inequitable treatment for those schools and the students who choose to attend them. The Charter Center will continue to advocate for the creation of a capital financing mechanism that would place public charter schools on equal fiscal footing with their traditional public school counterparts.

**PRE-KINDERGARTEN FUNDING**

Governor Cuomo has proposed a new program that would fund full-day pre-kindergarten programs for higher-need students in lower-wealth school districts via a competitive process. All-day kindergarten represents a critical service in the disadvantaged communities where most charter schools are located, providing a potentially high-impact educational intervention as well as a logistical benefit to working parents. Although a competitively-funded initiative is a laudable and positive step, charter schools would not be eligible to compete under the terms of the Executive Budget. As public schools providing some of the most high-impact educational services to the very families this program is intended to benefit, charter schools should be included alongside traditional public schools as eligible applicants. The Charter Center calls on the Senate and the Assembly to do so in its budget proposals.

**CONCLUSION**

The New York City Charter School Center appreciates Governor Cuomo's continuing leadership on public education issues, which is evident again in the 2013-14 Executive Budget. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.