

NOTES/FEEDBACK ON DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Charter School Housing

1. Rhode Island school housing aid for public charter schools is set below the state minimum for traditional districts. This inequity is exacerbated by the difficulty of identifying, purchasing, and renovating suitable school housing. Taken together, these factors create extremely challenging conditions for public charter schools in Rhode Island.

Reimbursement rates and difficulty identifying, purchasing and renovating suitable school housing make it extremely challenging for charter public schools in Rhode Island, especially because ***the current funding formula provides them with no money whatsoever for their facilities costs***. District school buildings are generally owned by municipalities, so those expenses are carried on the towns' books, but charter schools' unfunded facilities costs averaged \$2,130 per student in FY 14 (\$540 for debt service, \$410 for rent, and \$1190 for capital projects).

2. Public charter schools should be eligible for a housing aid reimbursement that is associated with the socio-economic status of the communities served by the school. However, any adjustment that increases state investment in charter school housing must be accompanied by safeguards that ensure prudence and the security of the investment. To the extent possible, any property invested in by a public charter school using public funds should remain public property in the event that the school ceases use of the building.

One basic way to address any concerns re: state investment in charter school housing would be to make vacant and underutilized public buildings more readily available to charter schools. In some states, charter schools are given a right of first refusal to purchase or lease such properties, often at nominal rates or with lease subsidies. This helps address charter schools' facilities challenges and results in improvements to public buildings that would otherwise deteriorate.

3. Rhode Island should continue to pursue school housing solutions that promote the full and effective use of publicly-owned buildings, thereby minimizing the under-utilized space and maintaining the investment of public funding in public buildings.

Agreed! Offering charter public schools more opportunities and incentives to purchase or lease vacant or underutilized public buildings that those schools then improve and occupy would be a win for schools, towns and the state.