

## Question 2: An Act to Allow Fair Access to Public Charter Schools

### *What are the goals of Question 2?*

Question 2 is about choice, access and equity.

Nearly half the state's urban public school students are attending failing district schools in cities that are currently frozen to new public charter schools. Question 2 focuses charter school growth in these low-performing districts, ensuring families have fair access to more high quality public schools.

### **What Question 2 Would Do.**

- **Focuses public charter school expansion in the lowest performing districts.** Question 2 would keep existing charter enrollment caps in place, but it would allow the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education additional flexibility to authorize up to 12 new charters or expansion of existing charters per year. Priority would be given to state's lowest performing districts (those in the bottom 25%), which are currently up against enrollment caps and where parent demand for more charters is significant.
- **Keeps the country's strongest charter accountability system in place.** Question 2 would not change the rigorous charter school approval and oversight process that has helped make Massachusetts' charters the best in the nation. It also requires public charter schools to submit to annual performance reviews according to standards established by the state.
- **Ensures that public charter school growth happens slowly and strategically.** The state's strict application process has led to slow, measured growth of charters - fewer than four per year. The rigor of the application and renewal process would not change under Question 2.
- **Reaffirms requirement that public charters schools recruit and retain all children,** including children with special needs and English Language Learners.
- **Ensures equitable funding of charter and district schools.** The state Constitution prohibits ballot questions from including provisions related to state funding. Question 2 does not make any changes to the current charter funding formula, which ensures that public education funds are dedicated to educate children in whichever public school their parents choose.

### *What Question 2 would NOT do.*

- **It would not automatically approve 12 new charters a year,** anywhere, anytime, proposed by anyone. Every new charter would still have to go through the state's approval process. New charters would be prioritized in

districts that rank in the bottom 25%, are up against existing caps, and where demand is high.

- **It would not affect education budgets in suburban districts** where schools are performing well and demand for new charter schools is low. Question 2 clearly targets new charters for low-performing districts. Since 1999, only two non-urban charter schools have been approved by the state. Under the current funding formula, only districts that lose children to charter schools are impacted.

***Why is the Act to Allow Fair Access to Public Charter Schools so important for families in Massachusetts?***

- **In many urban and rural districts, the quality of public schools is uneven across neighborhoods.** Currently, close to 50% of the children who attend public schools in Boston and other urban districts are being educated in schools considered underperforming by the state. These children can't wait another generation for those schools to improve when we can create more high quality public charters now.
- **The Commonwealth has the nation's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest achievement gap between low-income, African American and Latino children and white children.** Public schools in Massachusetts are the nation's best, but access to quality public schools is uneven across many districts. Public charter schools have provided families with more high quality choices. However, arbitrary caps on charter enrollment has frozen expansion in Boston, Holyoke, Fall River, Chelsea, Lawrence, Lowell and several other urban and rural communities that are underperforming.
- **Public charter schools in Massachusetts are among the nation's best public schools,** and have consistently outperformed traditional district public schools when it comes to closing the achievement gap. In fact, many urban charters are ranked among the best in the entire state – outperforming schools in affluent suburban communities. A 2015 report from Stanford University's CREDO Institute found that Massachusetts' urban charter schools provide significantly higher levels of academic growth in both math and reading, and have nearly closed the achievement gap.
- **Massachusetts' parents are demanding access to public charter schools.** More than 32,000 students across the state are currently stuck on waiting lists to attend public charter schools – 12,000 in Boston. Almost all of these children live in our lowest-performing school districts. This measure would increase the availability of high quality public schools in communities that need them most.