



# Arkansas Rural Ed Association

1309 Texas Street

Mena, AR 71953

479-234-2733

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To Joint Budget Committee

Chairs: Senator Larry Teague Representative Duncan Baird

Thank you for your service to our state with your commitment to the Arkansas Legislature. Your willingness to hear from impacted groups on various issues is vital to making quality policy decisions. The Arkansas Rural Ed Association has concerns with the proposed \$10 million dollars to fund charter school facilities. We would like for you to consider the following points related to the proposed allocation before deciding on whether this allocation of funds is in the best interest of all children of Arkansas.

1. The recent reduction of \$16 million in the facilities funding to offset the school health insurance increases has contributed to the depletion of available funds for public school facilities.
2. Presently, the facilities program does not have revenue available to fund the 2014-15 approved projects for public schools. The decrease in available revenue has caused funding for warm, safe, and dry to be de-emphasized.
3. The poorest schools in Arkansas will not have their facility needs met since the rules have been changed for funding warm, safe, and dry. Should a new facility program be started before we keep our commitment to fund facilities that the Courts approved?
4. By approving the \$10 million dollar appropriation, the state is choosing an alternate way to fund facilities for a select number of Arkansas schools. This program brings up a lot of questions.
  - A. Has there been a needs study to assess the need for creating a new state funding stream and facility program?
  - B. Is there a plan as to how the revenue will be distributed to charter schools?
  - C. Will charter schools be held accountable for the expenditure of those funds?
  - D. Will the revenue be distributed equitably among charter schools?
  - E. Will charter schools have to show efficiency in their use of the State Facility Revenue?
  - F. Will there be State Building Standards used when State Facility Revenue is used for charter schools
  - G. With the state's limited revenue, is it wise to begin a second funding stream/program when we have an excellent plan in place?

When everything is considered, AREA doesn't think we should set up a separate funding stream to fund a select group of schools. We certainly understand the need for additional funds for facilities since the current program is running out of money. However, this proposal doesn't do anything to resolve the facility funding issue for the poorest traditional schools in Arkansas. Again, thank you for your service to the children of this state. AREA appreciates the opportunity to express our concerns on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bill Abernathy  
Executive Director, Arkansas Rural Ed Association