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Rep. George Miller (D-CA) Opening Statement for the Markup of the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the senior Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce for the markup of the Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act.

Good morning.

From where I sit, the legislation before us, the *Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act*, is the first real piece of the rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I am encouraged by many aspects of the bill we're discussing today.

This country is in the midst of the most dynamic education reform atmosphere I've seen in my tenure in Congress.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act presents an opportunity to take hold of that momentum and finally bring our education system to the future.

It will be a tremendous disservice if we don't take the opportunity before us to fix the federal system that supports states, districts and our schools.

Today, we are specifically rewriting the Charter Schools Program, a key piece of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The charter school movement began in the early 1990s, intended as a laboratory for innovation and best practice.

Since then, more than 1.6 million, or about four percent of all public school students attend nearly 5,000 charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia.

Charter schools are not a silver bullet and won't solve all our education challenges.

But when they're run and managed effectively, and when they're successful for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, they can be used as a tool to drive innovation in our schools.

We know that innovation and creativity in schools lead to effective reforms.

And in turn, effective reforms transform schools and communities.

One of the best examples of this is high-performing charter schools.

These schools are closing the achievement gaps and shattering the low expectations that have stood in the way of educational success for at-risk students.

As we work to reform the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we need to be open to bold ideas that will help fix our schools, get us closer to our goal of delivering a world-class education to every student in this country and ensure all students have access to these innovative, high-quality educational opportunities

Great charter schools are proving that we can address disparities and close the achievement gap when we apply the right reforms and resources.

Both President Obama and Secretary Duncan are outspoken advocates for charter schools.

They agree that many of the bold reforms that are fundamental to building world-class schools are already happening in some charter schools.

Chairman Kline and I told the President we would work together to move a bipartisan bill.

The bill before us today is a good first step and barring detrimental amendments, I plan to support it.

First, this bill makes significant improvements to the Charter School Program and addresses issues we've discussed during committee.

It rightfully returns charter schools to their original purpose – as public schools that identify and share innovative practices that lead to improvements for all public schools.

It requires that charters be brought back into the traditional public system as opposed to running in a parallel system.

And it requires charters to actually serve all student populations and therefore provides parents with real choices.

Second, building on the notion of serving all students, this bill makes big strides on accountability.

It makes student achievement the focus of decisions made about charter school quality.

It greatly increases accountability on charter school authorizers, which is where accountability outside of Title I accountability rests for charter schools.

Third, this bill addresses a reoccurring problem in charter schools by dramatically improving access for underserved populations, like students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

It requires improved practice in recruitment and enrollment of underserved populations and requires the state to monitor these efforts.

And the bill requires services to those populations to ensure families are being provided actual choices in the system.

Lastly, this is truly bipartisan legislation. My staff and Chairman Kline's staff worked closely together in crafting this bill and I believe their hard work is very clear.

With this bill, students with disabilities, English language learners and other traditionally underserved students will have increased opportunities to attend and succeed at high-quality charter schools.

This bill holds charter schools accountable to their performance, their students, and their community through strengthening quality authorizing practices, providing transparency on financial audits, and putting student achievement and equal access at the center of decisions on renewal and expansion.

My goal with this bill, and with almost every education bill we work on in this committee, is to help our students, to bring our schools to the future, to help replicate what is working in some schools and bring that to all schools and to prepare every student to compete in our global economy.

This bill helps us get closer to that goal.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support.

I also look forward to discussing the committee's activity report when we get to it in this markup.

I yield back.

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