

Why Do Charter School Operators and Advocates Resist Regulations that Expand Transparency and Accountability?

In Ohio and throughout the nation, charter advocates and operators resist regulations for their enterprise. Typically, they are successful in stopping proposals that make charters more accountable and transparent.

The charter school business enterprise has also resisted reasonable monitoring and oversight. ECOT in Ohio is but one example of a charter escaping close scrutiny. ECOT, in its first year of operation, was caught fudging on the number of students enrolled and was forced by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to return funds to the state. In a bizarre twist, ODE and ECOT signed an agreement that ECOT would thereafter monitor its own enrollment for payment purposes. After about 15 years later, ODE did an enrollment audit for a current year and found fraud in the amount of \$60 million for just one year. To further enhance the intrigue of the ECOT debacle, the State Auditor had given ECOT an award for excellent financial accounting, while ECOT was stealing tens of millions each year.

Another example of state officials overlooking fraud in the charter industry is that when a group of former charter school teachers complained to the State Board of Education about fraudulent activities in a charter in which they had previously taught, ODE suggested the teachers who registered the complaints might lose their teaching license. A charter school official in a private conversation reported that the State Board of Education President and another state official each reached out to assure the charter school officials that they would be held harmless.

The charter industry has good reasons to resist regulations. Many in the charter world have much to hide from the taxpayers and state officials. Some crooked charter school officials get caught in wrong-doing; others likely do not.