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TESTIMONY REGARDING THE EXECUTIVE EDUCATION CYBER CHARTER APPLICATION

**Pennsylvania Department of Education
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. My name is Tomea Sippio-Smith. I am the K-12 Education Policy Director at Public Citizens for Children and Youth.

I'm here today to ask that you consider the following information as you review the application for Executive Education Cyber Charter School. The Department should view this application cautiously as all 14 of Pennsylvania's cyber charters scored below the statewide average in English and math assessments and all 14 have been identified as needing support under the states ESSA School Improvement and Accountability plan. Beyond this concerning track record, my testimony outlines three specific reasons why the submission and program outlined by the Executive Education Cyber Charter School application is inconsistent with the criteria in Pennsylvania's charter school law (24 P.S. § 17-1745-A(f)(1)).

First, programs outlined in the application seem unlikely to enable students to meet state academic standards. As the name suggests, the Executive Education Cyber Charter is closely connected to an existing Allentown brick and mortar charter school called the Executive Education Academy Charter School (or EEACS). The lead applicant, Mr. Steve Flavell, is a founder and the current Chief Operating Officer at EEACS. Mr. Robert Lysek is CEO at EEACS and is listed as a founder of the proposed cyber charter school. In addition, Executive Education Cyber Charter proposes to use a business education model much like the approach currently implemented at EEACS.

Based on EEACS's performance, it is very likely that the applicant – which has the same leadership and educational program – will not enable students to meet state academic standards. EEACS lagged the statewide average in



percent of students by roughly 20 percentage points in English and over 25 points in Math for each of the last two testing periods. The school is also in Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) status. Given the commonalities, the Department should address the needs of EEACS before authorizing a new cyber charter.

Second, real estate and financial connections between the proposed cyber charter and its brick and mortar counterpart merit scrutiny. The Executive Education Cyber Charter would be located at 555 Union Blvd in a building owned by the Executive Education Academy Charter School Foundation which has a mission to “make gifts and grants to the Executive Education Academy Charter School.” In short, the cyber charter would be paying rent to a foundation set up to directly benefits the brick and mortar school.

The Department raised concerns about similar “arrangements in which charter school entities lease space from foundations established solely to support the charter school entity” its 2019 proposed rulemaking on Charter Schools. More due diligence is required to assess possible issues concerning support and planning and ability of this school to serve as a model for other public schools.

Finally, the applicant does not document its ability to provide comprehensive learning experiences to students, including the amount of live instruction they intend to deliver. The application is conspicuously silent on the extent their model relies on recorded programs, offering only that “courses will be delivered asynchronously and synchronously within the LMS and/or third party video conferencing software” and that “our teachers will act more like facilitators or learning coaches.”

National studies document the importance of live instruction, especially for young learners, and most Pennsylvania school districts are relying on synchronous teaching in their virtual programs. In contrast, the average 2nd grader enrolled in a cyber school receives about 36 minutes of live instruction daily. The application is silent on this critical issue, and fails to describe the manner in which teachers will deliver instruction, assess

academic progress and communicate with students to provide assistance as required by Section 1747-A.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.