

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 3, 2025

School Leaders Respond to Governor Shapiro's Continued Attack on Cyber Charter School Students and Educators

The Governor's 2026-2027 State Budget Proposal would slash \$250 million in state funding for K-12 students attending a public cyber charter school in Pennsylvania.

The following is a joint statement from the leaders of seven public cyber charter schools in reaction to Governor Josh Shapiro's proposed 2026-2027 State Budget, released earlier today.

"Year-after-year Governor Shapiro has shown a disregard for the 65,000+ students and their families who have chosen a public cyber charter school in Pennsylvania, and blatant disrespect for the educators and school staff who work tirelessly in our public schools. In November, the Governor enacted the 2025-2026 State Budget which resulted in \$175 million (the largest funding cut to public cyber charter schools since their creation in 2003) being slashed from the resources supporting students who have chosen to be educated in public cyber charter schools. Less than three months since that historic funding cut went into effect and the Governor is now proposing to add another \$75 million in cuts to cyber charter school students, in order to appease his political allies that would like nothing more than to see public school choice eliminated in Pennsylvania.

The \$175 million cut from public cyber charter schools last year (which we have estimated to be closer to \$300 million by the end of the 2025-2026 school year), has already forced some of us to lay off hundreds of invaluable educators and staff in order to ensure our schools can continue to serve our students. These are dedicated professionals who the Governor claims to value and respect - - as long as they work in public school districts.

Earlier today, the Governor made it a point to say in his speech that our State Constitution "guarantees every Pennsylvanian access to a 'thorough and efficient system of public education'" but he continues to pick and choose which children should benefit from that guarantee. Students who attend public cyber charter schools are not political pawns, and they are entitled to the same level of financial support and respect as their peers who choose to attend a brick-and-mortar public school.

Nearly 1,500 cyber charter school parents, teachers, and school staff called and emailed Governor Shapiro over the past week calling on him to protect public cyber charter schools in his 2026-2027 State Budget Proposal. The voices of those families and education professionals were ignored today.

We have heard many times from the Governor that he supports school choice and his efforts to reform cyber charter school funding will not take school choice options away from Pennsylvania

families. His actions over the past three years have shown the exact opposite to be true. It is time for those who support school choice and support public cyber charter schools to hold Governor Shapiro accountable."

###

MEDIA CONTACT

Jessica Hickernell
Hickernell Consulting LLC
jessica@hickernellconsulting.com

NOTE - You can contact the school leaders directly for additional information using the following contact information:

Dr. Debra Heath-Thornton, CEO at PA Virtual Charter School - dheath@pavcs.us
Mr. Don Asplen, CEO at Achievement House Cyber Charter School - dasplen@achievementcharter.com
Dr. Malynda Maurer, CEO at Central PA Digital Learning Foundation - mmaurer@cpdlf.org
Dr. Jon Marsh, CEO at Esperanza Cyber Charter School - jmarsh@esperanzacyber.org
Mrs. Jane Swan, CEO at Reach Cyber Charter School - jswan@reachcyber.org
Dr. Michael Leitera, CEO at PA Distance Learning Charter School - michael.leitera@padistance.org
Mrs. Beth Jones, Interim CEO at Insight PA Cyber Charter School - bejones@insightpaschool.org