

Dear Councilmember Tolbert,

As a St. Paul resident passionate about our city and about education, I am writing to ask you to not to adopt a blanket policy against issuing conduit revenue bonds to charter schools.

Charter schools are an important and valuable option for St. Paul families. We need to keep students at the center, and while St. Paul Public Schools work for most students, some are better served by charter schools with programming more tailored to their needs. Our city is home to some excellent charter schools designed specifically to meet the needs of student populations that have been traditionally underserved. A blanket policy blocking the issuance of conduit revenue bonds would stand in the way of progress for schools that are effectively serving our city's youth.

Nonprofits, including charter schools, are a huge asset to our city, ensuring a strong system of services and supports, and should continue to qualify for the conduit revenue bonds. The proposed resolution singles charter schools as the only nonprofit that cannot qualify for these bonds. This is an issue of equity given the diverse population of students and families charter schools serve.

This proposal is also punitive and short-sighted. It will require charter schools to spend more money on financing, and will not be a financial benefit to the city--which will in fact lose revenue through the loss of fees. This is not the right approach to resolving larger land use questions. I ask you to not to advance counter-productive policy on this issue, and to engage with local schools and the families they serve to more deeply understand community needs and how St. Paul can support all students, regardless of the school they attend.

Thank you for your commitment to our children and community,

Shannon Niebuhr  
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