



City of Northampton

MASSACHUSETTS

In the City Council, November 7, 2024

Upon the Recommendation of: Councilor Marissa Elkins
 Councilor Alex Jarrett
 Councilor Deborah Klemer

R-24.160

A RESOLUTION OPPOSING EXPANSION OF THE PIONEER VALLEY CHINESE IMMERSION CHARTER SCHOOL

A History of Opposition in Northampton

WHEREAS, the Hadley-based Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) failed in 2016 and again in 2019 to obtain a charter amendment from the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that would have permitted it to increase its maximum enrollment; and

WHEREAS, PVCICS is again seeking authorization from the Board asking to expand its maximum enrollment from 584 to 684 K-12 students, despite public testimony from current PVCICS caregivers that the school is not meeting the needs of its current student enrollment¹; and

WHEREAS, the Northampton City Council, in September 2016, voted unanimously to approve a resolution "[Opposing Lifting the Cap on Commonwealth Charter Schools](#)" and in November 2018, a resolution "[Opposing Expansion of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School](#)"; and

WHEREAS, the Northampton School Committee opposed the expansion of PVCICS in 2017, and voted again to express its opposition on PVCICS's current request in a letter to local legislators and DESE at its November 14, 2024 meeting; and

WHEREAS, in November 2016, the last time charter school expansions were on the ballot statewide, Massachusetts voters opposed lifting the cap on Commonwealth charter schools by

¹ See Gazette article <https://www.gazettenet.com/Pioneer-Valley-Chinese-Immersion-Charter-School-in-Hadley-to-again-seek-100-student-increase-in-enrollment-57169231>

a margin of 62%-38%, with the voters of Northampton opposed by a margin of 72%-28%, and all of Hampshire County opposed by a margin of 74%-26%.

Funding Diverted to Charter Schools Risks the Stability of Northampton Public Schools and Harms Our Students

AND WHEREAS, in the '23-'24 school year enrollment in NPS was 2,495 students, with 21.8% of these students with disabilities, 42.8% high needs, and 31.5% low income². PVCICS's enrollment was 552 students with 15% students with disabilities, 32.1% high needs, and 20.5% low income³; and

WHEREAS, in the years since PVCICS last requested to expand its enrollment, Northampton has been forced to divert \$2.3 million (FY 2017), \$2.5 million (FY18), \$2.6 million (FY19), \$2.3 million (FY20), \$2.5 million (FY21), \$2.8 million (FY22), \$2.6 million (FY23), \$2.9 million (FY24), and \$3.0 million (FY25), for a total of \$23.5 million away from Northampton schools, to six nearby Commonwealth charter schools, to support an average of 190 students per year; and

WHEREAS, Northampton Public Schools is paying \$733,832 in FY2025 for 44 Northampton students attending PVCICS, and these numbers will likely increase if the requested PVCICS expansion were granted by the State board; and

WHEREAS, the impact of funds diverted to charter schools on the budgets of the Northampton Public Schools and the City of Northampton's general budget is substantial, representing 7.2% of the Northampton Public Schools' operating budget and 2.4% of the city's entire operating budget; and

WHEREAS, funds diverted to charter schools from Northampton Public Schools have played a significant role in an ongoing budget crisis in Northampton, resulting in the elimination of 21 positions in Northampton Public Schools despite an 8.49% increase in funding from the city over FY '24, the largest increase in at least 30 years.

² See

<https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=02100000&orgtypecode=5>

³ See

<https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=04970000&orgtypecode=5>

The Charter School Funding Formula Undermines Democratic Processes and the State Is Not Fixing the Problem

AND WHEREAS, charter schools in the Commonwealth are privately run and are not democratically accountable, yet are publicly funded by taxpayers when dollars are diverted from local school district funds; and

WHEREAS, despite strenuous advocacy over many years by Northampton's representatives in the state legislature, Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, local elected leaders, students, teachers and administrators, caretakers, and an untold number of other stakeholders to address the flawed Chapter 70 state funding formula, the formula remains unchanged and underfunded; and

WHEREAS, the flawed funding formula has resulted in Northampton receiving only a 13.1% increase in state funding for public education in 15 years which, adjusted for inflation, is effectively a 29.1% decrease in state funding for Northampton schools; and

WHEREAS, even Senator Comerford's attempt during the fiscal year 2025 legislative budget sessions to create a task force to merely study and make recommendations for updating the calculation of required local contributions as defined in Section 2 of Chapter 70 of the General Laws died in the legislature⁴; and

WHEREAS, the inequity of the charter school funding system sows unnecessary tension, creates competition rather than fostering cooperation, and undermines democratic processes in communities across the Commonwealth.

A Message to Our Leaders

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Northampton City Council joins with the Northampton School Committee and Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra in calling on the Commonwealth's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to reject the proposed expansion of enrollment at the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School; and

⁴ See Section 172 of the FY25 Senate Budget calling for the creation of a Chapter 70 task force to study and make recommendations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council President is authorized to submit a letter to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and to speak with the Board Chair to express this body's strong opposition to any expansion of PVCICS, as well as this body's opposition to the addition of any new charter school seats until the charter school funding formula is fundamentally reformed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Northampton's representatives in the State Legislature are encouraged to redouble their efforts to achieve fundamental reforms leading to more equitable and expanded funding of the Commonwealth's public schools.

Adopted in Final Reading on Roll Call Vote of 7 Yes, 0 No, 2 Absent (Councilors Perry and Rothenberg)
In City Council, November 26, 2024

Attest: , Clerk of Council

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Northampton City Council on November 26, 2024
Passed final reading and enrolled.

Per Charter Section 3-6, non-binding resolutions are not required to be presented to the Mayor for approval.

Attest: , Clerk of Council