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NC Department of Public Instruction
Office of Charter Schools
Mr. Dave Machado, Director
6301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6301

Dear Mr. Machado and Advisory Board Members:

Recently our district was notified that two charter schools, Alpha Academy and Omega School of the Arts, have applied to open in Scotland County. I am writing to the Charter School Advisory Board to request these schools not receive state funding. We strongly oppose opening charter schools here in our district. Rather than revisit all of the valid educational and technical concerns we have about the applications, we will concentrate our opposition on four areas of primary concern: the detrimental financial impact, the teacher shortage, the limited student resources available, and the real potential for segregated schools.

To begin, the financial impact that opening a charter school would have on the district's already bare-bones budget would be crippling. Scotland County is one of the poorest counties in the state with one of the highest unemployment rates. The County Commissioners continue to feel the economic strain on their limited budget. In fact, the county's financial commitment to the public school system has been reduced by approximately 2% each year for the past three years which equates to almost \$500,000 in total. If these two charter schools were to open here in our community and the Commissioners were forced to fund them, their limited financial resources would have to be spread even further leaving all schools underfunded.

Back in 2014, our district began a school consolidation effort to address our declining enrollment and expense of operating some of our schools under capacity. Our consolidation plan addresses several other challenges as well, but it also has allowed us to tackle the issue of the declining physical structure of some of our schools by consolidating two of the existing elementary schools into one new school facility. This consolidation plan is based off of current and projected

enrollment. If these charter schools are allowed to open and they pull students from our school system, school capacity would again become an issue and class size would be affected.

Like most counties in our state, Scotland County faces a teacher shortage. The lure of larger, more metropolitan districts tends to pull educators away from small, rural communities like ours. Currently, we still have seven full-time teaching positions open. To open two additional schools in our community where we would, in large part, be hiring from the same pool of potential educators, would make a challenging situation nearly impossible. Not only would the charter schools be in competition for new hires, but they would also pull some of our current teachers and administrators out of our classrooms and buildings as well leaving our public schools more understaffed.

One of the many advantages of our public school system here in Scotland County is the services that we provide our students. We participate in the Community Eligibility Program where all of our students are able to eat two meals, breakfast and lunch, at no cost. Based on their applications, the charter schools would not be serving breakfast. At lunch, we serve hot entrees, not the bag lunches that the charter schools would be offering. In a community with such a high poverty rate where the meals at school are often times the only ones that our students have, it is critical that these meals be available, free, and nutritious. Transportation is also an issue for many of our students. Seventy-five percent of students ride a bus. The charter schools, while providing transportation if needed, will have a very limited number of buses and drivers where it would at least, make the bus routes extremely long.

Not only do we meet our students' basic needs such as food and transportation, we have implemented the whole-child model which addresses their social, emotional, and mental health needs as well. We have social workers and guidance counselors in all of our schools and we are one of the very few districts in the state that have school-based mental health workers as well. In addition, we are a 'trauma-informed' school district. One out of every four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event. Knowing the effects that trauma can have on a child's learning and/or behavior, our district has invested in the training to ensure that we are meeting and responding to all of the needs of our students.

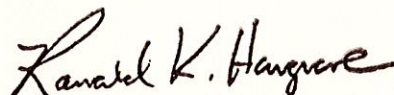
The state funds Exceptional Children programs at 12.75%. Of the almost 5,900 students in our district 18% are being served by our EC department. This means that 5.25% (over \$1 million) of the funding for our EC department comes from our local funds. Their needs are great and the cost is high, but we willingly take on those costs because it is our mission to ensure that every child has what they need to be successful. Based on their applications, neither of the proposed charter schools have the funding nor the personnel to even provide basic EC services. What would

inevitably happen is the most vulnerable students in our community would not receive the services that they need and deserve if they were to attend the charter schools.

And finally, what could conceivably be the most damaging to our county, is with these charter schools focusing on primarily recruiting African-American students, our schools could become more racially segregated. One of the consistent requests from our community during our school consolidation process was to not only remedy the capacity issues, but to take this as an opportunity to address the equity and equality of our schools as well. Studies have shown that student achievement is greater when the schools and classrooms are diversified. Our schools should reflect our community and promote unity and equality. Charter schools that target only one demographic do nothing but divide a community even further.

In closing, we simply cannot afford these schools. We should not financially support these charter schools that are merely attempting to duplicate programs and services that we already successfully offer and provide. For the good of our community, and most importantly our students, we ask that you deny funding for the Alpha Academy and the Omega School of the Arts.

Respectfully,


Dr. Ron Hargrave, Superintendent
Scotland County Schools