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Dear Auditor General DeFoor,

I am writing to follow up on a conversation that the staff of Education Voters of PA had with staff in your office on Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am. During this hour-long meeting Sandra Miler, Ed Voters' Advocacy Coordinator, and I shared information with your staff [about more than \\$35 million that cyber charter schools](#) had spent on advertising over a two-year period and expressed grave concern about the potential misuse of tax dollars in Pennsylvania's cyber charter sector.

I am writing today to share information that Ed Voters has recently uncovered and to call on you to immediately open an audit of Commonwealth Charter Academy. CCA has not been audited by the state in nearly a decade and with an annual reported expenditure of \$313 million for 2020-2021, with no state oversight and as evidenced by social media posts and emails sent to families, the opportunities for waste, fraud, and abuse of tax dollars by this school are extraordinary.

Education Voters of PA has obtained emails, reimbursement forms, and screen shots from a Commonwealth Charter Academy Facebook page that reveal during the 2021-2022 school year, CCA, Pennsylvania's largest cyber charter school with an enrollment of nearly 20,000 students, is using tax dollars to:

- Send every family [a cash payment of \\$150](#) (March 25, 2022)
- Provide a [\\$250 "community class" cash reimbursement](#) for each student enrolled
- Provide a [\\$200 "personal field trip" cash reimbursement](#) for each student enrolled

Facebook posts in a CCA parent page show families discussing spending tax dollars provided by CCA to:

- Purchase meals and games Dave and Busters arcade
- Attend a Motley Crue concert
- Take a trip to Austria
- Buy Eagles tickets
- Take family vacations to Universal Studios and Disney
- Pay for scuba, ski, and horseback riding lessons

CCA is also using school field trips to market to families. On its website, CCA boasts that students are allowed to attend [one paid field trip per month](#) as part of more than 700 organized trips with the school for both individual and [social](#) field trips to locations including "Sky Zone in Lancaster County, where students can jump on trampolines and the Blue Mountain Resort's Summit Ariel Park, where students will have access to four different ropes courses and have a chance to go ziplining or go through the obstacle course." Other field trips offered by CCA include, "laser tag, rock climbing, bowling, and kayaking."

These paid school field trips are **in addition to** the field trips and community classes families receive an annual \$450/student cash reimbursement for.

An [email dated May 13, 2022, from CCA to parents](#) details that for the 2022-2023 school year CCA will:

- [Provide families up to \\$240/month](#) for participation in group field trips by paying for students and two caretakers to attend two paid field trips per month (increased from \$40/month per family in 2021-2022)

- Provide families with \$75/month cash payments as part of their Instructional Technology Subsidy (increased from \$50/month in 2021-2022)
- Provide a \$300/student “community class” cash reimbursement for each student enrolled (increased from \$250 in 2021-2022)

**It is unacceptable that while school districts are starving and property tax increases are squeezing home and business owners, cyber charter schools are so awash in excess funding that they are using property tax dollars to pay for students’ private activities and trips and giving cash payments to families.**

We are calling on your office to immediately open an audit of CCA to investigate these eye-popping abuses of tax dollars and answer the following questions:

- How much total money has CCA sent to families as cash payments over the past two years, including those sent on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022? Were any/all cash payments made with federal dollars or using funding from tuition payments made to CCA by school districts?
- How much tax money is CCA spending annually on field trips, including both the CCA-sponsored field trips and the reimbursed field personal field trips for families and community classes for students?
- What exactly are “community class” and “personal field trip” cash reimbursements paying for?
- What other trips/activities, exactly, has CCA provided reimbursements for over the past two years?

CCA has an enormous amount of tax dollars at its disposal and the documentation we are sharing about how this school is spending some of this money is deeply troubling. We are hopeful that a cyber charter school spending public dollars on Motley Crue concerts should be at least as high of a priority for your office as looking at the fund balances of school districts.

We would like to note that students in school districts should and do take educational field trips. PTOs, PTAs, and booster clubs fundraise year-round for many school district students to enjoy these educational opportunities.

It is reasonable that some amount of tax money would be spent providing educational field trips to cyber charter school students. It is not reasonable to even imagine a scenario where school districts use tax dollars to subsidize students’ private horseback riding, scuba diving, and ski lessons. School districts are not subsidizing family vacations to Disney, paying for their professional football tickets, or a day out to the Dave and Busters Arcade. And school districts are most certainly not providing \$150 cash payments to every family in their district.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or if you would like additional information.

Susan Spicka, Executive Director, Education Voters of PA

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