Testimony of Dr. Ann Smisko  
Deputy Director of Policy and Programs  
Raise Your Hand Texas  

Before the House Committee on Public Education  
The Honorable Dan Huberty, Chair  

March 28, 2017  

---  

Key Points  

HB 480 (Burkett)  
Position: Oppose  

HB 480 would allow charters to offer stand-alone pre-k programs that would be neither subject to the charter cap nor subject to any effective oversight or accountability for quality. As Texas currently lacks any means to ensure the quality of these stand-alone programs, we must respectfully oppose HB 480.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Ann Smisko, and I serve as Deputy Director of Policy and Programs at Raise Your Hand Texas. I appear before you today on behalf of Raise Your Hand to register our concerns regarding HB 480 and respectfully testify in OPPOSITION to the bill.

As you and the members of the committee know, Mr. Chairman, Raise Your Hand Texas has long been committed to high-quality, full-day pre-k for Texas students. We are believers in the beneficial impacts that a high-quality pre-k program can deliver to children in terms of both their social-emotional and cognitive development that will support positive academic outcomes.

In Texas, we are fortunate that a significant number of our charter schools do offer pre-k as part of a larger offering that includes grade levels that are evaluated under the state accountability system. Indeed, a recent study by Bellwether Education Partners and the Fordham Institute identified Texas as one of a small handful of states that it deemed “hospitable” to charters offering pre-k, rating Texas 45 out of 50 on its scoring rubric. One of the only reservations that the report noted with respect to pre-k and charters in Texas was:

Authorizer oversight of charter pre-K is weak. Texas has many charter schools serving preschool students. However, it does not appear that the state’s major authorizer, the Texas Education Agency, has developed any standards or procedures to monitor the
quality or student learning outcomes of charter schools’ preschool programs—other than the metrics and standards TEA uses to monitor the quality and outcomes of K–12 schools.

This reservation goes precisely to the heart of our concerns regarding HB 480. The bill would allow charters to offer stand-alone pre-k programs that would be neither subject to the charter cap nor subject to any effective oversight or accountability for quality. As Texas currently lacks any means to ensure the quality of these stand-alone programs, we must respectfully oppose HB 480.

Conclusion
High-quality pre-k is vital to the future success of Texas students and our state, and our state’s charter schools have a valuable role to play in extending high-quality pre-k to more students. While well-intentioned, HB 480 does not move Texas closer to the goal of high-quality pre-k as it lacks effective mechanisms for oversight and quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.