



## Torchlight Student Educates Lawmakers | June 10, 2016

Posted by: Kerra Bolton

Ashanty Reyes strode confidently to the microphone.

A room full of important grown-ups in dark business suits turned toward her. News cameras clicked, anticipating her words.

In a clear, ringing voice, Ashanty said:

“Hello my name is Ashanty Reyes and I’m a third-grade student at Torchlight Academy, a charter school here in Raleigh. I love my school. I love my friends and teachers and principal. Together we’ve learned and done so much.

But recently I found out my school gets treated differently than other public schools where my friends go. Why is that, Representatives? In school we’re taught about a

Supreme Court case that makes sure every child gets to go to schools that is treated equally —shouldn't we listen to that law?

My school deserves the same books and classrooms and playground as every other public school in North Carolina. Please, Representatives, vote for House Bill 539 so my teachers, principals, and classmates get treated the same as those at other schools in Raleigh. I want to be treated fairly.”

Ashanty was asked this week to speak to the North Carolina House K-12 Education Committee by Marcus Brandon, a former state lawmaker and now executive director of CarolinaCAN, a nonprofit education research organization, as part of a statewide effort to restore full funding to public charter schools.

House Bill 539 restores money to public charter schools that was once shared with them by local school districts. Unfortunately, a 2010 change in state law allowed local school districts to restrict funds they have to share with public charter schools.

As a result, public charter schools now receive, on average 73 cents for every dollar traditional public schools get. Almost \$39 million was denied to public charter schools this year alone.

Ashanty's voice and the voices of the more than 77,000 children who attend public charter schools across the state are needed to cut through the misinformation, political posturing and obstruction of this bill.

But as Rep. Larry Pittman, R-Cabarrus, eloquently reminded the House committee, charter schools are public schools. Ultimately, the responsibility of the North Carolina General Assembly and the taxpayers of this great state is to fully fund and provide for the educational needs of all children in the state, regardless of where they go to school.