



Empowerment Academy – Chattanooga

BRIEF STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF APPEAL

Dear Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

The Governing Board of Empowerment Academy respectfully appeals to the Hamilton County Board of Education's denial of its amended charter application. We request that the Commission conduct an independent review of the record and conclude that Empowerment Academy has demonstrated the educational vision, organizational capacity, financial readiness, and governance necessary to successfully establish a high-quality public charter school serving students and families in the Hill City community of North Chattanooga.

The review team's findings primarily identify opportunities for additional specificity rather than an absence of educational quality or organizational capacity. Since the initial submission, the governing board has continued strengthening every aspect of the proposal through expanded community engagement, operational planning, professional consultation, and implementation activities. The record now demonstrates a governing board prepared not only to open a school, but to sustain one.

I. The Record Demonstrates a Compelling Educational Need

Empowerment Academy was established in response to documented educational disparities affecting children and families in North Chattanooga. Since submission of the amended application, the Tennessee Department of Education released updated 2026 achievement data further validating this need. In Hamilton County, only **40.6%** of students met expectations in English Language Arts and **43.0%** met expectations in mathematics. Achievement gaps are even more significant among historically underserved populations. Only **25.9% of Black students** demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts and **25.4%** demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. Among economically disadvantaged students, only **23.0%** demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts and **24.1%** demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. These outcomes reinforce the need for innovative public-school options intentionally designed to improve academic achievement while addressing the unique needs of underserved students.

II. Empowerment Academy Has Demonstrated Readiness to Operate

Empowerment Academy has progressed well beyond conceptual planning. The governing board has established the foundational components of a functioning school system by securing a facility, assembling certified educators, adopting curriculum, coordinating transportation, enrolling students with completed health records, implementing a successful Summer Enrichment Program, and developing a Parent-Teacher-Association Community framework. These accomplishments demonstrate operational readiness and the Board's ability to execute its vision responsibly.

The Academy's instructional model integrates standards-aligned literacy and mathematics instruction with MTSS/RTI intervention, project-based STEM learning, agricultural education, leadership development, social-emotional learning, and meaningful family engagement. Rather than presenting isolated initiatives, Empowerment Academy offers an integrated educational model intentionally designed to improve student achievement while preparing children for lifelong success.

III. The Governing Board Has Demonstrated Capacity Through Expertise, Community Investment, and Continuous Improvement

The Board is led by **Natisha Brooks**, a licensed educator in Tennessee and Florida and founder of Brooks Masters Homeschool Academy. The governing team includes **Miles K. Brooks Jr. Esq.**, a licensed Tennessee attorney who has worked in both the governmental and private sectors; **Dr. Terri Strong**, a community advocate with more than thirty years of nonprofit and youth development leadership; **Angela Roberts**, bringing twenty-six years of grant writing and resource development experience; and **Dr. Swift**, licensed in SPED Mild to Moderate and obtains a **Masters in Curriculum and Instructional Design Concentration**; **Rev. Beryl Basden**, who holds her **E.D.S in Reading and Literacy Leadership**, she is also licensed in **SPED to Moderate and Learning Disabilities K-12**; and **Stacy Gayle**, who is **TEFL** (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) & **TESOL** (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) **certified to support ELL and dually identified students**; whose combined forty-five years serving diverse learners and students with exceptionalities strengthen the Academy's commitment to equitable educational programming.

In addition, board members have donated curriculum materials, instructional resources, volunteer hours, and professional expertise before receiving a single dollar of public funding. Partnerships with churches, community organizations, and local stakeholders further demonstrate meaningful community confidence in Empowerment Academy's mission.

To date, supporters have invested approximately **\$164,394.18 toward planning and development** of the proposed school, including:

- **\$75,000** in financial support from Mt. Sinai AME Church (Memphis), Mt. Zion Baptist Church (Memphis), St. John AME Church (Memphis), Warren Chapel AME Church (Chattanooga), and Greater Bethel AME Church (Nashville);
- **\$59,105** dedicated to professional charter development, consulting, and grant writing services;
- **\$7,500** invested in charter application preparation;
- **\$2,894.09** supporting production of the original charter application; and **\$2,895.09** supporting preparation of this appeal.
- **\$5,000** grant from Chattanooga Community Partners
- **\$2,700** donation from Bishop Dr. Harry C. Wright
- **\$5,500** donations from Miles K. Brooks Jr. Esq.

IV. Approval Serves the Best Interests of Hamilton County Students

Empowerment Academy is no longer simply a proposal on paper. It is a school community built upon documented educational needs, experienced leadership, meaningful community partnerships, operational readiness, and substantial private investment. The governing board has established the systems, personnel, and organizational infrastructure necessary to successfully serve students from its first day of operation.

For these reasons, Empowerment Academy respectfully requests that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission reverse the denial issued by Hamilton County Schools and approve the Empowerment Academy charter application. Approval will expand high-quality educational opportunities for students and families in North Chattanooga while allowing a prepared and committed governing board to fulfill its mission of developing confident learners, strong leaders, and engaged citizens. **The governing board has chosen the three locations, Middle, East, and West as a representation of the three stars on the Tennessee Flag.**

Respectfully submitted,

Natisha Brooks

President, Governing Board

Empowerment Academy