THE OFFICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS
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Submitted October 6, 2026, for the October 8, 2026 Quarterly Commission Meeting

Dear Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

Memphis-Shelby County Schools ("MSCS") would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission staff and Commission members for the thoroughness, professionalism, and diligence demonstrated throughout this appellate cycle, while simultaneously carrying out the Commission's ongoing authorizing responsibilities. We value our shared commitment to the Tennessee Quality Charter Authorizing Standards and to maintaining rigorous, transparent, and equitable processes for charter school applicants.

As an authorizer, MSCS relies on these quality authorizing standards as our guiding framework for consistent, evidence-based decision-making and to ensure that applications recommended for approval demonstrate the capacity necessary to serve students successfully. We appreciate that the Commission staff's independent review and resulting recommendation closely align with MSCS's assessment of the Empowerment Academy Memphis application. This alignment provides meaningful validation of the rigor and integrity of the local review process and reinforces the importance of applying consistent standards at each stage of charter authorization.

The Commission's independent review and recommendation reinforce the substantive concerns identified through MSCS's evaluation and demonstrate alignment between the state and local authorizing processes in applying rigorous standards to charter school applications.

In accordance with the TN State Board of Education scoring rubric, MSCS determined that the Empowerment Academy Memphis application did not provide sufficient evidence of capacity across the academic, operational, financial and addenda sections to satisfy the criteria for approval. In particular, the application lacked adequate detail regarding essential academic components and the effective implementation of the proposed STEAM ("agriculture") model across an all-male, grades K-5 population. The application also did not provide sufficient evidence regarding supports for special population students. Additionally, MSCS identified inconsistencies and deficiencies across multiple areas of the application that raised concerns regarding recruitment, enrollment, staffing, operations, financial sustainability, governance, and the school's ability to successfully implement its proposed academic program.

For these reasons, MSCS respectfully requests that the Commission uphold the Executive Director's recommendation and affirm the Shelby County Board of Education's decision to deny the Empowerment Academy Memphis application. We sincerely appreciate the Commission's thoughtful consideration of this matter and our continued partnership in advancing high-quality charter authorizing practices on behalf of Tennessee students and families.

Sincerely,

Arlandra Parker

Arlandra Parker
Director, Charter School Development