

# THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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## Spokane legislators introduce charter school proposal

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Senate Bill 6163, introduced by Sens. Michael Baumgartner and Andy Billig, would make charter schools accountable to locally elected school boards.

OLYMPIA – The charter school system in Washington, struck down by a state Supreme Court ruling last September, has new hope in a bipartisan proposal introduced by Spokane lawmakers Monday.

Democratic Sen. Andy Billig and Republican Sen. Michael Baumgartner, both from Spokane, filed a bill to make charter schools accountable to locally elected school boards. In striking down the state's voter-approved charter school law, the high court previously took issue that charter schools were supported with state dollars and governed by a board not elected by residents. The court said in November it wouldn't reconsider its decision.

If the bill becomes law, a potential charter school would negotiate freedom from district policies like the length of a school day, policies regarding staff and curriculum.

A charter school would meet with its district regularly and be compliant with many state laws, regulations and standards.

"This bill creates a framework for school districts to create a charter school and it will be very much up to the district and the charter school to fill in the details of that framework," Billig said Monday. He added that the nine operating charter schools in the state would have an expedited process to apply to their school districts.

Charter schools will stay open at least through this school year, according to Maggie Meyers, a spokeswoman for the Washington State Charter Schools Association. The schools have been trying temporary fixes after losing state funding because of the court's decision. Meyers said Monday the association is confident the Legislature will find a way to keep the charter system open but added charter schools "could close if the Legislature doesn't act."

Washington voters narrowly approved charter schools in 2012.

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