

Another bill proposed to save charter schools in Washington

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Lawmakers will have two bipartisan charter-school bills to consider when the new session starts next week: one tackles the funding source, the other addresses governance.

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The second bipartisan bill floated this week to save charter schools in Washington would tap lottery funds to pay for them.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Eric Pettigrew, D-Renton, and Sen. Steve Litzow, R-Mercer Island, who chairs the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee.

[Their proposal](#) would, among other things, direct charter-school funding to come from the state's [Opportunity Pathways Account](#), which uses state lottery money for early childhood education, higher-education grants, scholarships and other programs aimed at innovation.

The Washington State Supreme Court ruled Sept. 4 that the charter-school law is unconstitutional because charter schools aren't "common" schools and therefore aren't entitled to public money exclusively intended for those schools.

Lottery revenue isn't restricted to common schools, but the high court also ruled that lawmakers couldn't use money from other general-fund accounts because the state can't tell which dollars come from which sources.

On Monday, Sen. Andy Billig, D-Spokane, and Sen. Michael Baumgartner, R-Spokane, [announced a bill](#) that tackled another element of the court's ruling, which held that charter schools aren't common schools because they have appointed rather than elected boards.

Their bill would allow school districts to contract with nonprofit organizations to run charters under much tighter control of the elected school board than was envisioned in the charter-school law that voters approved in 2012. Under that law, charters were publicly funded, but privately run institutions overseen by a state commission or authorized school district.

Under the Spokane senators' proposal, school districts that want charter schools could seek proposals from nonprofits to serve any need the district wants.

Billig said his bill wouldn't conflict with other measures, such as the one proposed by Litzow and Pettigrew.

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