

# House committee won't consider charter school bill Thursday



Students in support of charter schools wear blue tee shirts as they sit in the back of a House Education Committee hearing room before testimony about a bill designed to keep Washington's charter school system alive Friday in Olympia. The bill has already passed the Senate. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

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SEATTLE — The House Education Committee decided Thursday not to consider a bill that would establish a new funding source for Washington charter schools. But some lawmakers said the issue was not dead for this session.

Senate Bill 6194, which has already passed the state Senate, was proposed as a fix to the charter law that the Washington Supreme Court has found to be unconstitutional.

Committee chairwoman Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos, D-Seattle, said she removed the bill from Thursday's voting list because she was still waiting for a report on solutions to problems with the charter school initiative that voters passed in 2012.

Republicans tried to put the issue back on the agenda. But a motion to do so failed on a vote of 10-10. It required 11 votes.

Santos and House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan, D-Covington, both said after the committee meeting the issue could come back before lawmakers.

“The whole issue will be whether or not the work group is able to develop a proposal that passes the sniff test for the Supreme Court,” Santos said.

Sullivan said the goal is to resolve the issues and not have charter schools land back on the legislative agenda next year.

“If you’re not careful, you’ll wind up having something struck down again by the Supreme Court,” he said.

In its ruling in September, the Supreme Court said the new state law is unconstitutional because charter schools are not governed by elected school boards and because of the way they are funded.

On Feb. 19, the committee held a public hearing on the bill. Ed Pacheco, a parent with children in Yakima public schools, said he wants alternatives like charter schools because too many Latino students are struggling.

“We want access to high quality alternatives,” Pacheco said.

Catherine Ahl of the League of Women Voters, the group that sued over the charter school law, said Washington already has innovative schools. She said SB 6194 does not answer all the Supreme Court’s concerns.

“The case is still in the court. Please do not move this bill forward until the case is decided,” Ahl said, noting that the Supreme Court only ruled on part of the case and sent it back to the lower courts.