

Tax dollars from failed charter schools go uncollected, candidates say

By [Michael D. Pitman](#), Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER TWP. —

A pair of statewide candidates are saying their political adversaries in this November's election are "laying down on the job" as millions of dollars are going to failing or failed nonpublic charter schools, and not into the coffers of successful public school districts.

But representatives for Ohio Auditor David Yost and Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine said that accusation couldn't be further from the truth.



State Rep. John Patrick Carney, D-Columbus, and former Hamilton County commissioner David Pepper, also a Democrat, said Yost and DeWine are not doing enough when it comes to collecting the millions of dollars owed back to the state by failed charter schools.

“Unfortunately for our state, under Republican leadership, (efforts for charter school transparency) has gone the exact opposite way of trying to provide accountability and oversight,” said Carney, who will challenge Yost in November. “The path to the American Dream goes through the public school system and sound and quality education.”

Carney along with Pepper, who will challenge DeWine in November, held a press conference at The Square at Union Center in West Chester Twp. Monday afternoon. Nearly \$476.9 million in taxpayer money has been transferred to failing charter schools across the state, according to the Carney campaign, which compiled data from the Ohio Department of Education and the Columbus-based nonpartisan think tank, Innovation Ohio.

Carney and Pepper said, according to that same data, nearly \$83.5 million has been transferred from “A” rated public schools to “F” rated charter schools in the state. And Carney said in Butler County, Ross, Talawanda, Lakota, Middletown and Hamilton school districts have lost around \$8 million collectively to poorer performing charter schools.

“All schools and administrators should be held to the same level of accountability, regardless of whether they are public schools or charter schools,” Carney said, who also held a press conference with Pepper and others in Hamilton County Tuesday morning. “Families have the right that their tax dollars are going to schools that deserve it and that their children are being provided the best education possible to allow them to succeed.”

Carney, who is “a supporter of good schools,” said charter schools are important, but it’s “discouraging though when those doing the worst job seem to like they’re getting the most money.”

Brittany Halpin, a spokeswoman for David Yost’s political campaign, said the first-term auditor has been a watchdog of taxpayer dollars, even when it comes to charter schools.

“Here are the facts: Auditor Dave Yost found more than \$9 million in stolen or misspent public money in Ohio’s charter schools, turned 22 corrupt officials into convicted criminals, and partnered with the FBI to put a notorious charter school crook behind bars,” she said. “The message is clear — under Auditor Yost’s watch, charter schools must follow the law or face the law.”

Pepper said outside of House Bill 520 — which Carney jointly sponsored with Rep. John Patterson, D-Jefferson, and calls for open records for charter schools — “there’s nothing being done.”

“There’s \$31 million missing from failed charter schools. The attorney general’s job is to collect that,” said Pepper, who currently works as an attorney. “They’ve collected \$500,000 out of that \$31 million. If the auditor and attorney general would work together, they could go find that money.”

Dan Tierney, a spokesman for DeWine's office, said they're mistaken to think the Attorney General's Office isn't doing anything to collect taxpayer dollars from failed charter schools. "I don't think they read beyond the headlines because it just shows a basic lack of understanding of how charter school collections work," he said.

Tierney said it is the local counsel's liability to first try to collect any finding of recovery owed, which could be a local school district or prosecutor's office. He said after a couple of months, if that debt has not been collected by the local authority, the attorney general's office by law is the "default collector" of any debts. And there is only a six-year statute of limitations to collect any findings for recovery, as opposed to delinquent tax collections where there's a 40-year statute of limitations.

Tierney said to extend any statute of limitations, the attorney general's office would file lawsuits, but collecting is difficult.

"In the cases of failed charter schools, these are entities that have shut down with no assets, no operations ... no income," said Tierney. "And we're asked to collect money that's already been spent."

He said they do have recourse to seek the bond of the treasurer of a failed charter school — if there is a valid bond — or the owner of record, but often they typically have no money to pay the findings for recovery.

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