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AEA commends Alabama Public Charter School Commission for revocation of Woodland Prep Charter

Montgomery, Alabama, February 3, 2020: The Alabama Education Association (AEA) is grateful the Alabama Public Charter School Commission took a strong stand against a bad charter school today by initiating the process to revoke the charter of Woodland Prep in Washington County. Time and again, the organizers of the school refused to meet deadlines set by the Commission and asked for extensions, up to and including today's meeting. Thankfully, their time has run out.

Local AEA members sounded the alarm about this bad charter application even before a prior group of Commission members voted to approve it. That led to increased scrutiny of Woodland Prep and Soner Tarim, the Texas-based charter school franchiser who is behind the scheme to open a charter school in a county without a failing school. Before Woodland Prep's presentation today, the Commission heard from LEAD Academy, Tarim's first Alabama charter school. Officials there acknowledged that Tarim has abandoned the school, leaving them scrambling just to make payroll. That resulted in AEA filing a lawsuit alleging fraud by Tarim and others by providing the Charter School Commission false and inaccurate information.

Two weeks ago, AEA attorneys were in court on behalf of local members and the Washington County Education Association as part of a lawsuit challenging the opening of Woodland Prep. That suit alleges fraud by Tarim and his local collaborators with regard to who is actually behind the school and claims of local support when there was none for the proposed charter school.

AEA President Sherry Tucker said, "AEA has been clear that we are not against charter schools – we are against bad charter schools. Woodland Prep was going to be a bad charter school. Our local leaders saw it, local elected officials saw it, and the national experts who evaluated their application saw it. The old commissioners should not have approved its application, but we are grateful to the new members who are stepping forward to carry out their duty to stop bad charter schools."

Theron Stokes, AEA Associate Executive Director, said, "Today was a great day for public education in Alabama. Instead of hundreds of thousands of dollars flowing out of rural Alabama and into corporate coffers in Texas, that money will stay in a school district that, despite its disadvantages, is succeeding in providing a quality education to its students. The new members of the Charter School Commission have made clear that they take seriously their mandate under the law to police charter schools and we stand ready to assist them in that effort. AEA hopes this will send a message to the judge in the case, to allow the plaintiffs in the lawsuit to go forward to validate that what the defendants were trying to do to the public-school students in Washington County was wrong."

The Commission will next issue formal notice to the backers of Woodland Prep and provide them due process. The lawsuit in Washington County is pending before the judge on several legal motions filed by the defendants which were heard on January 21. A ruling could come at any time. AEA intends to take all appropriate actions to see this matter through to the end on behalf of the children and educators in Washington County.