

Proposed charter school ban fails on tie vote in NM House

By [Dan McKay / Journal Staff Writer](#) Thursday, March 2nd, 2017 at 8:54pm

.....
.....

SANTA FE — A proposal to halt approval of new charter schools in New Mexico failed on a tie vote in the state House late Thursday.

The proposal was blocked 34-34, with Democrats largely in favor and Republicans opposed.

Three Democrats — Debbie Rodella of Española, Patricio Ruiloba of Albuquerque and Carl Trujillo of Santa Fe — joined Republicans to force the tie.

The failed motion to pass the bill came after roughly two years of intense debate.

Rep. Christine Trujillo, an Albuquerque Democrat and sponsor of the bill, said it was time for a pause on the approval of new charter applications. Some of New Mexico’s roughly 100 charter schools are doing well, she said, and others are not — making it a good time to take a break and see what’s working.

“Let’s find out what those best practices are,” Trujillo said.

She and other supporters also raised questions about how best to use the state’s limited funding for public education, arguing that new charter schools would dilute the money available.

But House Minority Leader Nate Gentry, R-Albuquerque, said the waiting lists for students to get into some charter schools is a sign of how much parents value the choice, especially in areas where the traditional schools are failing.

“Charter schools are the great hope for so many children,” he said.

Gentry and other Republicans said the prohibition on new charter schools would prevent successful charters from starting new schools to accommodate the demand.

House Bill 46 would have enacted a two-and-a-half-year moratorium on accepting new charter applications, between June this year and Jan. 1, 2020.

Rep. Gail Chasey, D-Albuquerque, said it was a good time to take a “breather” without harming schools already in operation.

“I really see this as an opportunity to improve the charter schools and not to stifle them,” Chasey said.

Rep. Jim Dines, R-Albuquerque, argued that halting the acceptance of charter applications isn’t necessary to evaluate them.

“Don’t study it by shutting down the opportunity for the students,” Dines said.

Charter schools now enroll 7 percent of students in New Mexico, according to legislative analysts.

Trujillo is a retired teacher and former president of the American Federation of Teachers, New Mexico.

Her bill was only one-sentence long. It didn’t specifically call for a study,

though Trujillo said that's her hope.