

Remarks to Assembly Committee on Education; July 19, 2017

Matt and Julie Weingart, Livermore CA

Mr Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you today, and for your evident commitment to extracting the lessons that can be learned from the TVLC fiasco.

We are Matt and Julie Weingart, parents of three children who were students in the Livermore charter schools. Julie served on the Charter Prep Foundation Board and Site Council over a period spanning 40 months, until ultimately resigning. We both worked as part of the effort to build and sustain the charter schools; and, in the final years, exhaustingly and futilely, to rescue them from TVLC predation.

I will not belabor the human damage that was done by the utterly unnecessary implosion of these formerly great schools, at the hands of TVLC. Everyone here knows the magical good that can be done in a child's life by one positive educational experience. Imagine flipping that on its head, and trying to calculate the lost opportunities and direct harm consequential to when a flourishing school community, classrooms full of treasured friends and beloved teachers, special-service and after-school programs, student body traditions and identities, and hopes for futures based on transferrable transcripts, are all blasted apart by crass greed – betrayingly enabled by a nugatory oversight framework.

LVJUSD mitigated the harm by taking in the refugees: we are grateful for their courageous and principled conduct; we could not have asked more of them. But the trauma and harm – to children, to families, to teachers – were great nevertheless.

But what I wish most to emphasize to you, is how unnecessary and avoidable it all was. None of this happened in the shadows. None of what Mr Fine described here today takes any of us by surprise. I commend the diligent work of the FCMAT team, but it is important that the Committee understand: the AB139 was narrow in scope, and confirmatory, not revelatory. It merely furnished greater forensic proof for what was universally known years ago, which was the mode of conduct, object, and general outline of the greater “syndicate” of which TVLC was an instrument.

It was anything but a secret that the syndicate's goal was, conspicuously, to use the charter schools as disposable stepping stones toward real estate acquisition and the private-school's ends: hosts to grow a

parasite that would never have granted them better than a perpetual state of anemia – and, when they became more trouble than worth, bleeding them out entirely.

None of the “legislative reform” we have heard discussed of late seems it would have helped the TVLC case in the slightest. No “For-Profit” CMO’s? TVLC was a non-profit, run shamelessly with a profit motive. Public Meeting rules? TVLC claimed to be subject to the Brown Act, yet merely used those rules to refuse to answer community questions; but, also to empanel Quisling directors and officers beholden to the syndicate, in direct (but penalty-free) defiance of the Act, their District authorizers, the constituents’ will, and their own Bylaws.

No set of laws, in the absence of accountability ensured through principled oversight, matters a whit.

Much of what the CMO did here was blatantly impermissible, under today’s laws or any others. Yet it was permitted. The issues were assiduously documented by LVJUSD and the New Jerusalem District; and those staffs’ efforts were augmented by literally tens-of-thousands of hours of exposition and constructive campaigning by our community. Yet TVLC always took refuge in the friendliness they claimed they could count on from above, from the County and State; they confidently – and correctly – reassured their partisans that the District authorizers were toothless, and endlessly evadable. Indeed, when we looked for help from the oversight chain above the District, for demanding transparency, accountability, honesty, and lawful conduct from TVLC, and to check the mis-governance we could prove was ongoing... we found those authorities staunchly impotent; even seemingly on the other side of the issue.

This Titanic hit the iceberg in broad daylight. Then it took, literally, years to sink. The damage was serious, but did not have to be mortal. We passengers did what we could to patch the leak, but with the crew intent on scuttling the ship for the insurance money – and the Coast Guard standing by just for issuing citations after-the-fact – above two-thousand souls of precious cargo went into the water and had to be picked up by lifeboats, and a major investment of State education dollars now lies at the bottom of the sea.

I hope that we do better next time.

Thank you.