

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS BLACK AND LATINO LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

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LUCAS A. DEBARROS
Executive Director

March 22, 2019

Senator Jason M. Lewis
Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St., Room 511-B
Boston, MA, 02133

Representative Alice Hanlon Peisch
Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St., Room 473G
Boston, MA, 02133

Re: Education Funding Testimony

Dear Chairman Lewis, Chairwoman Peisch, and the Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to present comments today regarding Education Finance Reform on behalf of the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus (MBLLC). I would like to take this moment to remind the committee that we created the Chapter 70 formula in 1993, so that all school districts across the Commonwealth have the ability to provide a high-quality public-school education – regardless of the race or the socioeconomic status of the students.

We started to recognize the growing inequities caused by an outdated formula and identified by the Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC). Two tenants of that commission's report dealt with two of our most struggling groups of students, English Language Learners (ELL) and Low-Income students. For ELL Students, the report recommended that ELL funding convert from a base rate to an increment on the base rate that would increase for all grade levels. For Low-Income students, the report recommended that we recognize the cost of educating low-income students as determined by the district's number of low-income students and an additional increment that is set between 50% and 100% of the statewide per-pupil average of the Foundation Budget.

Investing in our education is in the best interest of our Commonwealth. We are moved and motivated by the unified effort of all parties to address education by enhancing financial public resources in order to address the most needed communities and build upon the promise to educate every child and keep Massachusetts ranked #1 in Education.

We have a unique opportunity today to make impactful changes in the Massachusetts educational funding system for generations to come. While we are encouraged by the ongoing conversations regarding how much it will take to fund education, and how to pay for it, we are united in stating "it must benefit all the children in Massachusetts".

While there is no doubt that the costs of school employee health insurance and special education have outpriced their original funding allocations, ELL and Low-Income students should not have to bear the burden of

underfunding while we level off other costs and we are excited to see that one option identifies a fast track to more funding.

Today, there are currently 99,866 ELL students in our public schools, which accounts for 10.5% of the total student population. For perspective, nearly half of the total ELL population are enrolled at schools in the 15 biggest Gateway Cities and Boston; yet, recently only 64% of our ELL students graduated from high school in four years, which ranked 29th nationally.

Furthermore, there are currently 297,120 “Economically Disadvantaged” students, which amounts to 31.2% of the total public-school student population. Again, recently only 78% of our Low-Income students graduated from high school in four years, which ranked 18th nationally. By these same metrics, 79% of our Black students and 73% of our Latino students graduated high school in four years.

This means that 1 out of every 7 ELL students, 1 out of every 11 low-income students, and 1 out of 8 Latino students dropped out of high school. There are many studies that show direct correlations between educational achievement and socioeconomic status, societal behavior, and a higher tendency to turn to a life of crime that leads them in and out of the criminal justice system.

We debate many bills in both the House and the Senate each session to address these very issues. If we can increase educational investment with measurable outcomes and accountability, we can create a more equitable society for all Massachusetts residents and save the Commonwealth long term financial hardships in the future.

Each of the proposed educational funding bills before you today, more or less, tries to bridge the gap between current funding levels and the amount needed to provide an adequate amount of funding for all aspects of a student’s education.

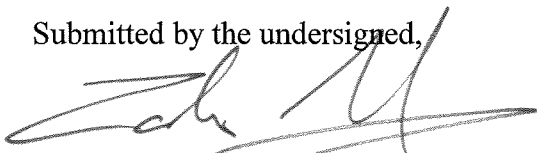
We acknowledge the efforts of the Administration to address the educational funding challenges, but we feel the proposed budget falls short and takes too long (7 years) for the funding.

#H586 and #S238, also known as the PROMISE Act, at this time provides the most financial resources to address the Low-income communities and ELL students, therefore it is the collective priority of the Black and Latino Caucus.

We also recognize that #H567 contains our same goals, including the English learners’ reforms, the school level funding transparency and uniquely offers a faster timeline for funding.

As you consider each proposal or pieces of each proposal, I implore you to not forget about our ELL and Low-Income students as you consider the best funding formula approach for the Commonwealth’s school districts and the future of Massachusetts.

Submitted by the undersigned,



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9th Hampden District

Rep. Bud L. Williams, Clerk
11th Hampden District

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