



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

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Representative Alice H. Peisch
House Chair, Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Peisch,

I write to you today respectfully to share my priorities for the education funding reform legislation currently under consideration by the Joint Committee on Education. I also wish to raise an issue of particular concern to Watertown and seek your and your staff's assistance in addressing it.

First, I strongly endorse the priorities outlined in the Progressive Caucus letter to you of July 17. In addition to incorporating the FBRC recommendations on English Language Learners, special education, and health insurance, I support legislation that includes: 1) a 100% low-income increment for districts in decile 10 while allowing districts to manually count their low-income students; 2) transparent data collection and reporting systems that ensure districts are using increased Chapter 70 funding as intended while avoiding unnecessarily intrusive and burdensome measures; 3) a foundation budget review and report every five years; and 4) mitigation for the impact of charter schools on the net funding available to districts.

The issue of particular concern to Watertown is the interaction between a reformed Chapter 70 formula and the special education circuit breaker. As you know, Watertown serves a large high-needs special education population that makes its level of special education funding one of the highest in the state (as a % of total school spending). It has relied on the circuit breaker as well as specific budget language, supported consistently by the House over the last several years, to help meet these extraordinary costs. It has been suggested that as a consequence of the

proposed changes to the foundation budget formula, districts like Watertown could see reductions in circuit breaker funding that would substantially offset any increase it would receive in Chapter 70 funding. I would very much appreciate an opportunity to hear your and your staff's assessment of this issue and, if necessary, explore with you how it might be addressed either in the education funding reform bill or separately.

Finally, I would like to echo the Progressive Caucus' request that the text of the education funding reform legislation be made publicly available, in the form in which it will be put before the full House, at least one week in advance of our debate. Given the profound, long-term importance of this legislation for education in all our communities, it is essential that Members have at least a week to consult with their districts and hear from constituents and other stakeholders about the specific language of the proposed bill prior to debating it.

Thank you for considering my comments and for all your work on this complex and crucial legislation. I will ask my aide to contact your office in the near future to arrange a time to discuss the special education funding issue raised above.

Best regards,



Jonathan Hecht

State Representative

29th Middlesex District

cc:

House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo

Aaron Michlewitz, House Committee on Ways & Means