

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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Benjamin Barnes
Secretary
Office of Policy and Management

Testimony Supporting House Bill No. 6357 and 6359

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR
CONCERNING EDUCATION
AND
AN ACT CONCERNING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill No. 6357, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education and House Bill No. 6359, An Act Concerning An Early Childhood System.

House Bill No. 6357 would make various revisions to the ECS formula and Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) to provide towns with a base grant of what they received in FY 2013, plus any phase in amount they may receive that is distributed based on the recommended task force formula, plus the reallocated FY 2013 distribution of the State Owned Pilot grant. The various formula changes include:

- No town will receive less ECS aid in 2014 or 2015 than it did in 2013;
- Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) eligibility weighted at 30% will replace Title I poverty;
- For most wealthy communities, the minimum aid ratio will be reduced from 9% to 2% and the minimum aid ratio for Alliance Districts will be 10%;
- More frequently updated income data will be used vs. census data every 10 years; and
- The foundation is increased from \$9,867 to \$11,754

The MBR for Alliance Districts (the 30 lowest performing districts) equals the prior year budgeted appropriation plus any additional local funds necessary to ensure that the local share of public school expenditures is at least 21% for FY 2014 and 22% for FY 2015. Any increases in ECS aid will be conditional, subject to the Department of Education approval for the purpose of improving district-wide academic improvement and reduction of any achievement gaps and implementing teacher evaluation and common core state standards. The MBR for non-Alliance Districts for FY 2014 and FY 2015 requires towns to spend what they spent on education in the previous year plus the additional \$50.8 million each year that is based on the phase in of the fully funded grant. Towns will have the discretion to provide tax relief with the additional \$73.6 million in funds that have been reallocated from the State Owned Pilot grant.

It also would continue the funding caps on the following grants: Health Service Private Pupils, Non-Public Transportation, Adult Education, Bilingual Education, Regional Education Service Centers and Special Education. This would save the state approximately \$43 million in FY 2014 and \$52.6 million in FY 2015.

The bill would establish a new grant to replace the existing Public Transportation of School Children grant that reimburses towns on a sliding scale based on town wealth for their transportation costs. The new grant would be a competitive grant that will award grants to local and regional boards of education for those that agree to coordinate and share public school transportation services. The new Transportation Incentive Grant is funded at \$5 million and the Transportation of School Children reimbursement grant is eliminated, saving the state \$79.7 million in FY 2014 and \$82 million in FY 2015.

It provides language that would allow SDE to proportionately reduce funding for local and regional boards of education if the amount of grants for the Healthy Foods Initiative exceeds the amount of funding for such purpose and funds the Healthy Foods Initiative program through the Community Investment Account, rather than through a general fund appropriation as is currently done.

Finally, the bill reduces the statutorily required level of per pupil grants for Charter Schools from \$11,000 in FY 2014 to \$10,500 and from \$11,500 in FY 2015 to \$11,000, which saves the state \$3.5 million in FY 2014 and \$3.7 million in FY 2015 and clarifies that Interdistrict Cooperation funding will fund only those programs that assist in meeting the Sheff goals and not other state wide programs as are currently funded, which will save the state \$4.8 million.

House Bill No. 6357 would establish the new Office of Early Childhood that will better coordinate early childhood programs by administering programs formerly administered by the State Department of Education (SDE), Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Department of Public Health (DPH) and Board of Regents (BOR).

Specifically:

Sections 3 through 12 and section 49 make various name changes in statute to name the Office of Early Childhood and its Executive Director for early childhood programs being transferred from SDE effective FY 2014, which include: the Early Childhood Program, School Readiness, Child Care Services, Quality Enhancement, Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education and other community and family programs that are used to garner private matching funds.

Section 5 also pushes out the school readiness staff qualifications requirement that programs have a bachelor degree teacher in each classroom until 2023 (from the current statutory date of 2020).

Section 10 makes some changes to the Early Childhood Cabinet to reflect their new capacity as an advisory group rather than a working group given the new Office of Early Childhood that will accomplish this work.

Sections 13 through 22 and sections 47 and 48 make various name changes in statute to name the Office of Early Childhood and its Executive Director for early childhood programs being transferred from DSS, which include: Care 4 Kids, Care 4 Kids 2-1-1 Info

Line and Charts-A-Course quality funding being transferred in FY 2014 and the Children's Trust Fund being transferred in FY 2015.

Sections 23 through 27 make various name changes in statute to name the Office of Early Childhood and its Executive Director for the Birth to Three program that is being transferred in FY 2015 that is currently administered by DDS.

Sections 28 through 41 and sections 43 through 46 update statutes concerning licensed child care entities (child day care centers, group day care homes, family day care homes) to reflect the transfer of associated regulatory functions from DPH to the OEC as of July 1, 2014. Additionally, Section 28 names the OEC as a successor agency to DPH for purposes of administering federal grant dollars received under the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, also as of July 1, 2014.

Section 42 transfers oversight of capital development projects for child day care facilities and guidelines for state-contracted child care center programs from the Commissioner of Education to the Executive Director of the Office of Early Childhood effective FY 2014.

Section 49 repeals the Office of Early Childhood Planning, Outreach and Coordination within the Department of Education since the new Office of Early Childhood will assume these duties.

I would like to again thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony. I respectfully request the Committee support these bills and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.