

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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WILLIAM F. WELD
GOVERNOR

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February 12, 1997

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

We are filing for your consideration the attached legislative proposal, entitled "An Act Relative to Dress Codes in Public Schools."

This legislation would give school districts the authority to set dress codes, including uniforms. Its purpose is to encourage a safe and disciplined learning environment in our Commonwealth's schools by decreasing violence and theft. Potential benefits of the bill include instilling students with discipline, helping parents and students resist peer pressure, preventing gang members from wearing gang colors at school, helping students concentrate on their school work, and helping school officials recognize intruders who come to the school. Several school districts, including Boston, Randolph, and Chelsea, have already adopted voluntary dress codes but are uncertain as to the extent of their authority. The bill continues to protect the rights of students as to personal appearance, but removes the barrier to permitting school districts to establish such dress codes.

This bill was part of our education reorganization package, which we introduced in 1996. The states of California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia have all enacted some form of school uniform legislation. Numerous school districts in these and other states have adopted school uniforms as part of their strategy to ensure a safe and disciplined learning environment, and have proven the success of such dress codes through reduced school crime, improved behavior, and increased attendance rates.

This bill would give the Commonwealth's school districts a much needed tool to improve our students' learning environment, and we urge your favorable consideration of this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

William F. Weld

William F. Weld
Governor

Margo Paul Cellucci

Margo Paul Cellucci
Lieutenant Governor

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Seven.

AN ACT RELATIVE TO DRESS CODES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

- 1 Chapter 71 of the General Laws is hereby amended by striking
- 2 out section 83 and inserting in place thereof the following section:—
- 3 Section 83. School officials shall not abridge the rights of students
- 4 as to personal appearance except if such officials determine that such
- 5 personal appearance violates reasonable standards of health, safety,
- 6 and cleanliness. Nothing in this section shall prevent a school district
- 7 from requiring the wearing of uniforms by students, or from estab-
- 8 lishing such standards of dress as the school committee or other
- 9 entity responsible for the district's schools deems to be appropriate.