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Governor Charlie Baker Testifies Before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker joined Secretary of Education Jim Peyser and Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Jeffrey Riley to testify before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education in support of *H.70: An Act to promote equity and excellence in education*. The proposal is a multi-year school finance reform initiative to increase funding for school districts to invest in a quality education and fully implement the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission.

Remarks as prepared for delivery:

“Chairman Lewis, Chairwoman Peisch, members of the Committee - good morning. I am pleased to be with you this morning to discuss our Administration’s proposal to update our state’s education funding formula.

“I think we can all agree that the formula needs to reflect today’s cost realities, and we need to intensify our efforts to close persistent achievement gaps for some of our students.

“How we get there is what we are working on together. We look forward to a robust public discussion on this very important piece of legislation.

“It is my hope that we can put the right mechanisms in place this year to ensure the best educational outcomes for all of our kids.

“Massachusetts set the bar for the rest of the country when we passed landmark education reform in 1993.

“Before that, efforts at education reform in Massachusetts did not adequately address inequities in state funding for schools, and did not raise expectations for student learning or school performance. While Massachusetts’ schools performed in the top quartile, we underperformed next to our peer states.

“As someone who was around this building during the passage and implementation of the 1993 Education Reform Act, initially as Secretary of Health and Human Services, later as Secretary of Administration and Finance, and then as a member of the Board of Education, I can tell you, that it would not have happened without a shared commitment by all involved in new funding and high standards. In fact, Secretary Peyser and I both served on the Board of Education during that time.

“The Education Reform Act put in place school finance policies, curriculum frameworks, student assessment, and adult accountability that set us on a steady course of unprecedented improvement.

“At the time, many people were skeptical the state would live up to its promises or that schools and districts would be able to meet higher expectations for performance.

“Thanks to bipartisan political leadership, and a shared commitment between state, local and school leaders and teachers, the Commonwealth converted the aspirations of the Education Reform Act into reality.

“In 2010, Massachusetts reaffirmed its commitment to accountability and high standards, establishing new tools for state intervention in underperforming districts, allowing Massachusetts to leverage federal funding for schools under the Obama Administration’s Race to the Top initiative.

“We created conditions that enabled our educators to do what they do best: teach our children.

“Over the last 25 years, the Commonwealth has kept its promises to our schools and communities by fully funding one of the most progressive state education formulas in the country. But as the Foundation Budget Review Commission found, the formula needs to be updated.

“I would personally like to thank all the members of the Foundation Budget Review Commission for the hard work and thorough review that laid out the challenges before us.

“Academically, there is much to be proud of. Year after year our students rank number one in many academic measures, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP, better known as the nation’s report card.

“Unfortunately, this success has not been shared by all communities and all students at an equal pace.

“In many communities, we see persistent achievement gaps and missed opportunities for our kids – especially in urban schools with high concentrations of low-income students and English language learners.

“If you dig into those NAEP scores, black and Hispanic students are not scoring as high as their white peers.

“While there has been steady progress since 2013, both black and Hispanic students scored below 220 on the 4th grade reading NAEP, while their white peers scored above 240.

“Our Gateway Cities, along with Boston, have seen significant gains from where they were 25 years ago, but they are still far behind their suburban peers, and in some cases have fallen further behind as gains in the suburbs outpace gains in the cities.

“It’s time to close these achievement gaps and continue to move all our public schools toward true excellence.

“Our multi-year school finance reform plan, An Act to Ensure Educational Equity and Excellence, will increase funding statewide so school districts can invest in a quality education for every child, regardless of their zip code.

“Our funding proposal directs significant increases to the highest-need communities that educate the most economically disadvantaged students, and represents a historic investment in communities that struggle with achievement gaps.

“The plan fully implements the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission by updating the formula to reflect the higher costs of health care, special education, and educating English Language Learners and low-income students.

“And it is a fully-funded proposal that is actionable right now. We can start making these increased investments in FY20, without raising taxes.

“Like the 1993 Ed Reform Act, our proposal is also phased in over 7 years - using existing revenue. By doing it over this stretch we are confident it can be a sustainable investment for both the state and local communities.

“When fully implemented the statewide Foundation Budget will have been increased by approximately \$1.1 billion, in current dollars.

“This proposal represents the most significant expansion of the Foundation Budget since the formula was adopted in 1993.

“House 1 includes an increase of \$200.3 million in Chapter 70 state aid, bringing total state aid to \$5.1 billion in FY20.

“Thank you for working with our administration over the past four years to increase state support for K-12 education by over a half of billion dollars. This includes a nearly \$60 million increase to Chapter 70 aid for healthcare – one of the major recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission. As a result, the Commonwealth is now covering a bigger share of the healthcare costs municipalities pay for their employees.

“I would now like to take a few minutes to discuss the components of our administration’s proposal that will fulfil the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission – starting this year.

“Our plan includes another \$30.6 million increase in Chapter 70 aid for health care, continuing our efforts to boost this critical part of the formula.

“Our school finance plan is very specific about the factors used to increase funding for low-income, special education, English Language learners, and how many years it will take to fully implement each of these categories.

“Our plan works to address the high costs of health care, changing the formula to bring it closer to what cities and towns actually pay. This will help put more money back into the classroom.

“Our plan goes beyond what the FBRC recommended in some areas, including expanding the category for counseling and behavioral health, to make sure all our students receive the services they need to be healthy and keep our schools safe. And

our plan provides additional resources for early college and career pathway programs, so all students can get a head start on their futures.

“In the proposed legislation, we revise the charter school reimbursement formula, which will increase reimbursements in the near-term and make the state a more reliable partner to districts that need charter tuition reimbursements.

“Finally, this proposal will also target additional support for the lowest-performing schools to offer programs that give every student greater opportunities to learn.

“Secretary Peyser will talk in more detail about the different aspects of the proposal in a minute.

“Through our joint efforts with you in the Legislature, we have increased state aid to our schools by more than \$500 million during the last four years.

“We now need to target increased investments in a way that will help those students who have been left behind.

“Our bill, in combination with our budget proposal, is the whole package – more money and accountability reforms to make sure this funding helps accelerate learning in schools that struggle the most to educate our kids.

“There are opportunities for underperforming schools to partner with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to invest in proven strategies that help kids learn, like extended learning time and acceleration academies.

“Commissioner Jeffrey Riley knows a thing or two about turning around a district. In Lawrence, he increased spending on classroom resources, provided enrichment opportunities for students, and found ways to recruit and retain great teachers – many from the community.

“A report released last week looked at student outcomes in Lawrence and they found that Commissioner Riley’s approach worked.

“Lawrence’s high school graduation rate increased from 47 percent in 2010 to 72 percent in 2018, and the school system’s dropout rate decreased from 9 to 3 percent during that time.

“The report points to Lawrence’s success, stating, “As the state considers a once-in-a-generation overhaul of public education, it should look to Lawrence and review lessons learned during its nationally-recognized turnaround.”

“In addition to investing over a billion dollars into our K-12 system, our plan includes proven tools that have yielded great success in struggling school districts, like Lawrence, to help our students get ahead and receive the high quality education they deserve.

“We think our plan strikes the right balance between expanding overall state education aid, targeting investments to schools and districts that need it most, and maintaining accountability for results.

“We look forward to working with you, our colleagues in the legislature, to pass a bill this year.

“Thank you, and I look forward to our discussion around this critically important initiative.”