



October 1, 2019

Senate President Karen E. Spilka
Massachusetts Senate
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senate President Spilka,

I am writing to submit testimony on behalf of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce on S.2350, the Student Opportunity Act ("SOA"). The Chamber appreciates your continued and steadfast focus on reforming the state's Chapter 70 education funding program.

The [Chamber's guiding principle throughout ongoing Chapter 70 reform discussions](#) is the need to close persistent and well-documented achievement gaps and guaranteeing that any investment will include the changes necessary to ensure results. With that view, we support amendments to the SOA that would determine adequate funding levels; hold the state, districts, and schools accountable for closing achievement gaps; and promote college and career readiness. We oppose amendments to the SOA that limit accountability and hinder our progress toward closing achievement gaps.

Support: Amendments that ensure funding adequacy, accountability, and promote college and career readiness.

Amendment #36, sponsored by Senator Tarr

Amendment #36 directs the Foundation Budget Review Commission to undertake an adequacy study of the foundation budget and its components. This study is critical to the success of Chapter 70 reforms because it is unclear how the increment amounts in the SOA were determined and how they are connected to closing achievement gaps statewide. This study will ensure that the state is allocating the appropriate amount of resources to educate our students now and in the future.

Amendment #35, sponsored by Senator Tarr

Amendment #35 requires the Foundation Budget Review Commission to convene periodically, but not less than every five years. Ongoing review of the foundation budget will ensure that the state is properly accounting for student needs and that resources are leveraged to their fullest extent.

Amendment #34, sponsored by Senator deMacedo

Amendment #34 enhances the accountability measures in the SOA by granting greater authority to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to encourage school districts make progress on closing achievement gaps. For districts with at least one school that the state has labeled as requiring assistance or intervention, the amendment allows the Commissioner to require specific amendments to three-year plans aimed at closing achievement gaps. Furthermore, if a district does not have an approved three-year plan for longer than one year it can be deemed as chronically underperforming and ineligible to receive discretionary funds from the Department of Education. Districts not taking sufficient steps to implement their three-year plans can also be declared 'chronically underperforming'.

Amendments #31, #46, and #47, sponsored by Senator Moore, Senator Gobi, and Senator Finegold respectively

Residents, businesses, and the Commonwealth benefit when the education system prepares students for college and the workforce. Effectively linking our education system and economy requires accountability and sufficient resources.

Amendment #31 requires the state and each district to include in their three-year plan targets and annual benchmarks for improving student college and career readiness.

Amendment #47 adds an early college enrollment category to the foundation budget, comparable to the one proposed in H.70, Governor Baker's education reform bill. Similarly, Amendment #46 grants the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education the authority to designate early college and innovation pathways as vocational programs, and in turn, make these programs eligible for a foundation increment.

More robust reporting will allow districts to understand post-high school performance. Dedicated resources, which can be guided by reported data, will increase student access to innovative programs focused on career readiness, including industry-recognized credentialing and work-based learning opportunities. Expansion of and exposure to these programs during K-12 will benefit students long after graduation.

Oppose: Amendments that hinder progress toward closing achievement gaps.

Amendments #3, #4, #5, and #6, sponsored by Senator Tarr

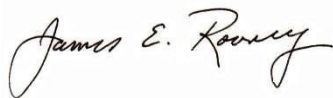
These four amendments raise the annual minimum per pupil aid increase from \$30 in the current bill to \$35, \$40, \$50, and \$100 respectively. The Chamber opposes both the codification of minimum aid in statute and efforts to raise the annual rate because minimum aid is regressive. Wealthier districts receive much more in minimum aid increases each year than lower income districts. The use of minimum aid diverts funds away from low-income communities in favor of high-income districts, hindering the state's ability to close achievement gaps.

Amendment #17, sponsored by Senator Jehlen

Amendment #17 strikes language from the bill that requires the state and school districts to set targets and annual benchmarks for eliminating achievement gaps. The amendment also dilutes districts' reporting obligations and eliminates the requirement that districts amend three-year plans that have been deemed out of compliance with the SOA. Eliminating these provisions would be a serious disservice to students across the Commonwealth. Without guideposts and accountability measures, there is no assurance that the SOA will close achievement gaps.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



James E. Rooney
President and CEO

cc: Members of the Massachusetts Senate