



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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*Magda Parvey, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools*

April 7, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey, Governor of Massachusetts,
State Senator Barry Finegold,
State Representatives Tram T. Nguyen,
State Representative Frank A. Moran,

As the Andover School Committee, we write to express serious concern regarding Line Item 1599-0012 of H 3545, which was filed by the Governor on March 20, 2023. While we commend the Governor and her staff for acknowledging the problem, we have identified language included in the \$75M reserve for extraordinary relief to school districts that could create unintended and negative consequences for many districts, including Andover, throughout the state who are on the cusp of qualifying for relief.

Background

- In late October 2022, without notice or transparency, the Operational Services Division (OSD) approved a 14% tuition rate increase for out-of-district, approved special education schools. This is a shocking and unprecedented spike considering that over the previous 13 years, the OSD rate increase averaged just under 2% annually, and comes at a time when districts are facing the simultaneous pressures of inflation on all other segments of their budgets.
- Despite a July 1st, 2023 effective date, at no point did OSD solicit input from school superintendents, budget officials or public educational professionals before approving the increase. This unanticipated and extraordinary increase will have a negative impact throughout Massachusetts in FY24. The domino effect is going to strain school budgets potentially triggering teacher layoffs, across the board cuts, fee increases and override requests – all of which will no doubt lead to larger class sizes in the Fall.

Unnecessarily Complicated

- While the language appears to be a ‘hold harmless’ provision for districts, upon further analysis, the ambiguous language creates an arbitrary cutoff that will leave many districts with no supplemental assistance to help offset the multiple burdens created by the 14% increase.

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- For example, a 100% reimbursement for a net increase of instructional costs exceeding 10% is great for those districts, however, it is exceedingly unfair to districts whose increase is on the cusp of 10%, because they will receive nothing.
- Rather than creating a list of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ by using the formula in H3545, the Committee asks the Legislature to hold districts harmless by calculating the total statewide cost of the 14% increase and providing a 100% reimbursement for all costs above 2%. Districts would be responsible for a 2% increase which is reasonable and is based on the previous thirteen years of OSD rate increases. The obligation for the remaining 12% would be shifted to the Commonwealth and covered by the reserve created in this budget appropriation language.

We are aware that budget season is here and appreciate the fact that you and your colleagues are presently holding hearings while trying to craft the FY2024 GAA. As a school committee, we understand the difficult job of meeting infinite needs with finite resources. Thank you for your attention to this pressing and important issue.

Sincerely,
Andover School Committee

Susan K. McCready
School Committee Chair

Tracey Spruce
School Committee Vice Chair

Lauren Conoscenti
School Committee Member

Emily DiCesaro
School Committee Member

Sandis Wright
School Committee Member