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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Memorandum

Date: February 28, 2016
To: House Committee on Rules, Representative Jennifer Williamson, Chair
From: Representative Lew Frederick
Subject: Senate Bill 1541 A, School District Expenditure Variation Study

Senate Bill 1541 A is scheduled for a Work Session at 9:00 AM on Monday, February 29th. I have a number of concerns about this bill, and believe that it should not pass. My concerns would remain if the A5 Amendment is adopted.

My most important concern is that this “study” would result in a report that would be relied on for future policy decisions, without evidence that the conclusions are valid. I know of no valid methodology for determining “whether expenditure variations are related to student outcomes, including attendance and absenteeism, standardized test results and graduation rates.” If that methodology has to be invented, how can this have a “minimal expenditure impact”?

Many factors affect student “outcomes,” and it’s possible that how local districts deploy their limited resources is part of it. But this bill includes no meaningful prescription for controlling the many other variables involved, and I believe it asks more of a study of expenditures than such a study can possibly deliver in terms of valid conclusions. If a future legislature were to use its conclusions to prescribe changes to local districts, the results could be tragic, producing yet another round of pointless turmoil for schools.

For example, this bill proposes to study variations in expenditures, without a comprehensive look at variations in *expenses*. How would this study treat variations in transportation needs across districts, variations that are necessary to provide children with comparable school days? More importantly, how would they go about drawing conclusions about how such variations relate to student outcomes? How would this study have the capacity to determine what that means in the context of other variations? In other words, sometimes variations in expenditures exist in order to produce comparable inputs for students. And I notice that, once again, local CPI has been left out of the picture, as it has been ever since the inception of the distribution formula. A meaningful study of this subject would not be a trivial undertaking.

I can see how a comprehensive comparison of expenditures and expenses would be interesting, and useful. But the leap to “determine whether expenditure variations are related to student outcomes....” is too far. It has the potential to dress conjecture up as science. I urge you not to pass this bill out of the Rules Committee and let the Education Committee look at it in more detail for 2017.