



Achieving Together

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Good morning/afternoon, my name is Brian Hamler and I proudly serve as Superintendent of Whitehall City Schools. I come to you on behalf of the taxpayers of our city and the 3400 students who attend our schools.

I have taught in this great state for 17 years and have been an educational leader for an additional 18 years. During that time, I have managed thousands of issues using a simple process that requires those who bring me a problem to also bring me a solution. So, I'm doing the same here today.

Over the past two budget cycles, our Treasurer, Steve McAfee and I have spoken to both our Senators and Representatives about the injustice of the gain cap and how it is draining our fund balance.

Today, with the recent proposals, we are finding that our district stands at a proverbial funding cliff. We feel the need to sound the alarm, to show you how the current proposals, although well intentioned, would pull the rug out from under our schools and taxpayers.

We appreciate the effort to supplement cap districts but this calculations is not fair to districts like Whitehall who experienced an average growth of 4.2% each year from 2013 through 2016. As it is proposed, this three-year look at growth hits our district at the exact wrong time and ignores the growth that we had in previous years.

There is a second, and very significant effect to the proposal which we find deeply concerning. Specifically that the supplemental for the cap districts only furthers the inequality of funding districts and deepens the divide for districts like mine as compared to others.

Districts who grew over the past three years will get a little boost while capped districts who showed significant growth in earlier years get very little or nothing at all. Once again, we are funding districts differently based on when their growth happened; Not whether it happened.

This proposal bases our funding on an arbitrary number with no formula in place. To kick the can down the road and tell districts you will get the same funding as you did last year, regardless of your change of circumstances, only serves to hurt districts like ours further.

We implore you to fix the funding formula or at the very least treat districts fairly and consider an idea that will supplement cap districts in a fair way.

Our Treasurer, Steve McAfee is here to share an idea that would provide relief to capped districts in a fair manner.

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. As Superintendent Hamler said, we're here to offer a solution to a problem. The problem is the Enrollment Growth Supplement. This supplement is intended to help districts that would be particularly challenged by a 2-year freeze in Foundation Aid. We would like to present data that shows it does a poor job and offer a better solution.

First we must answer the question "which districts would be most challenged by a 2-year freeze in Foundation Aid?" Of course it's the districts being underfunded today. The freeze would continue that unfair treatment for two more years. We have identified the districts currently being underfunded.

I invite you to follow along on the spreadsheet attached to our testimony. Using the June #1 School Finance Payment Report, we calculated net funding per enrolled pupil in Column I. We compared each district's per pupil funding to the average of the 50 districts most similar to that district in regards to local wealth per pupil (column J). We calculated the variance (column K) and sorted the spreadsheet from most to least underfunded.

For example, our district Whitehall City was the 15th most underfunded district. We're currently receiving \$2,369 less per pupil than the average of the 50 districts most similar to us in regards to local wealth.

Page 1 of the spreadsheet displays the 50 most underfunded school districts. These districts all receive over \$1500 less in state funding than other districts with comparable wealth. You can see the Supplement for Enrollment Growth in columns L and M provides no additional funding to 21 of those districts including Columbus City Schools, the 10th most underfunded district. Another 8 receive less than \$30,000 the first year. And while it's not really helping 29/50 districts that need it most, it's providing additional funding to 60 districts currently on the guarantee already receiving more money than the current formula says they should.

The better solution we propose would be to base supplemental funding on the amount districts are currently losing to the cap. You could fund 3.15% the first year and 4.75% the second year for the same amount of money as the Supplement for Enrollment Growth. But it would be much more effectively directed to the districts that need it most. For example, 3/5 of the total supplement would be directed to the 50 most underfunded districts as 48 of the 50 would benefit. You can see the amounts for each district in columns N and O.

The bottom line is that it's the caps and guarantees that have caused inequities in state funding to schools. The root of those caps and guarantees is much more complex than just student enrollment growth over the last 3 years. The Supplement for Enrollment Growth is short sighted. Please consider basing a supplement on amounts districts are losing to the cap to really help the districts that need it most. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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