

01.29.08 - Governor Testifies On Behalf of Article 87 Legislation

Governor Deval L. Patrick

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As Delivered

Thank you very much Chairman Wilkerson and to all the chairs and members of the committee, thank you very much for convening today and for having me. I want to also acknowledge the presence of President Mohler- Faria from Bridgewater State, my Senior Advisor on Education, the Chairs of the Boards of Education and Higher Ed, and I think the Chair of the Board of Early Education and Care is coming as well, she has jury duty this morning, but she will get one civic duty to another. The Commissioners, the acting Commissioner, now House Commissioner Plummer is here as well. We thank you very much for coming.

First of all, just let me thank you all for convening this hearing on our Article 87 proposal and for the opportunity to appear this morning in support of our proposal to reorganize the state education bureaucracies under a Secretary of Education. I want to start by offering an historical and policy framework for the proposal.

As you know our Commonwealth is the home to America's first public school; America's first college; America's first college for women; America's first school for the sight-impaired. Our forbearers appreciated that education was about advancing civilization and securing our future, so much so that they wrote that fundamental value into our constitution.

Your leadership, all of you here, those you represent elsewhere in the legislature working together with yourselves and with innovators in education from all across the country has kept our progress going. Thanks to that support, Massachusetts students achieve top scores in the NAEP's tests, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the so-called "national report card;" Massachusetts students are building on a foundation that you helped to strengthen. Indeed, on our trip to China just last month, reinforced a truth which you ought to know and celebrate, I certainly do, which is that pre-eminence in education is our calling card in the world. It is the reputation that this commonwealth bears and it is a tremendous asset in building our economy going forward.

Consistent excellence in public education is the signature objective of this administration. In that spirit I

believe, as you know, that the time has come for the next chapter in education reform. That's why in June we launched the Commonwealth Readiness Project, our effort to reexamine how we deliver public education in Massachusetts. We want to move into the next era of educational excellence with a seamless education strategy starting with high-quality, universally available early education, moving on to all-day kindergarten, on to smaller class sizes, particularly in the early grades, a stronger focus on math and science alongside art and music and other enrichment activities, and the chance to complete at least an associate's degree or an apprenticeship in a trade at the state's expense.

We have brought together educators, business leaders and community advocates to put together a plan to implement this vision for the future of public education in Massachusetts. Some 200 individuals are involved in developing recommendations, and I expect their recommendations in the spring, and look forward to sharing them with you and working with you to implement them. To implement the recommendations, to receive them if you will, and make them real, and to create a seamless and comprehensive education pathway for young people will take time, care, and very close coordination. The silos that now make up our governance mechanisms will not, in my opinion, work. That's why I'm here this morning.

Through our proposal we will create an executive office of education led by a cabinet secretary to serve as a single responsible authority within the coordinated system we envision and as a chief liaison to my office. The secretariat will consist of the Department of Early Education and Care, a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, what we now call the Department of Education, and a Department of Higher Education, each headed by a commissioner. The secretary will help coordinate the efforts of the boards and commissioners within the states three education agencies and be a central source of planning and accountability. One place where all of our educational efforts can be connected and from which a comprehensive policy will be driven.

I know we have had education secretaries before. This will be different in that he or she will have authority to approve mission statements and five-year master plans, budgets and capital outlay requests, both at the board level and in the case of higher education, at the individual institution level. The secretary will also hold a voting seat on all four of the educational sector boards, including the University of Massachusetts board.

President Mohler-Faria, in a minute, will testify in greater detail, and will gladly respond to your questions, more detailed questions. For present purposes, I do want to say, this legislation has been developed over many many months with the close cooperation of many of you here and I appreciate that. It's been a wonderful collaboration and the ideas are better because of that collaboration. I think more likely, not just to pass, but to succeed in practical effect, and I thank you all for that.

It is designed to improve coordination across all sectors of education, early education and care, K-12, and

higher ed. It creates a sensible structure that will, with your help, be in place to implement the recommendations of the readiness project over the next many years, with which we can guide students seamlessly through every level of public education and on into the workforce. We will be able to take swift, synchronized actions to meet the rapidly evolving demands of the world and economy of tomorrow. No other place in America is as well positioned as Massachusetts to lead in progressive education development. No other place in the country. It's because of the work that you have done and you have partnered with others to do over the last 14 years. And the sign of any successful system or organization is continuous improvement, and it's in that spirit that we've brought this reorganization proposal forward.

I look forward to and appreciate your favorable consideration.

Thank you very much for having me this morning.