

UP

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MSEA LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



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Issue 99

THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS

• Governor Hogan's Latest Budget Ploy

Late Thursday, Governor Hogan introduced another supplemental budget—that again fails to fund the priorities supported 176-10 by Democrats and Republicans in the General Assembly. Those priorities include full funding of the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI), a critical part of the state's commitment to education funding. In this budget proposal, the governor takes \$75 million from the GCEI funding and other priorities (state employee salaries and Medicaid funding) and uses it to add money to the state's supplemental pension payment.

This latest move from the governor further disrupts tenuous budget negotiations and is nothing more than political grandstanding in the 11th hour of the legislative session. The General Assembly's budget fully funds this year's pension obligation to the tune of \$1.5 billion, which includes an add-on payment of \$75 million. Furthermore, the legislature's action to end corridor funding and include a sweeper provision that will further bolster funding puts the pension system on solid footing and creates payments that are affordable and sustainable so that pension benefits are not at risk for current and future retirees. The legislature's plan would position Maryland as the only state in the nation to make supplemental payments in addition to the full actuarial pension contribution—and have an AAA bond rating to boot.

MSEA issued [this statement in response to the supplemental budget](#) and calls on the governor to end his budget games and get to the table for legitimate budget negotiations that will fully fund shared priorities.

• MSEA Calls on Budget Conferees and the General Assembly to Reject Tax Credits and/or Grants for Private Schools

As reported last week, Governor Hogan issued a budget proposal that snuck a revised version of the BOAST private school voucher initiative into budget deliberations. His budget proposes a business grant program, where a corporate entity can make a tax deductible contribution to a charitable organization, set up as a student assistance organization (SAO), and receive a 50% rebate in the form of state dollars. The SAO then uses the full contribution to fund vouchers for qualifying education expenses to private school students. Plainly spoken, this is a corporate welfare scheme that helps businesses and families who can already afford to send their children to private or religious schools. Additionally, this program provides limited accountability in where funds are directed and how they are spent and no protection for students or faculty if a private or religious school wanted to discriminate against them on the basis of religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

For all of these reasons, MSEA opposes the grant in the governor's budget, as well as the legislation still before the General Assembly, [HB 487](#) and [SB 405](#), the Maryland Education Credit. These bills create a similar failed program, but link it to a business tax credit, rather than a direct grant. The bills are also different, in that they would allow private and public schools to apply for voucher support through an established SAO. Just like the grant, the legislation is a program that directs public tax dollars to private schools.

Whether or not Governor Hogan chooses to continue to hold hostage education funding in the budget and shortchange Maryland's schools and students, MSEA opposes public funds for private schools and calls on budget conferees and the General Assembly to reject both the tax credit legislation and the corporate welfare grant. MSEA, Maryland PTA, ACLU of Maryland, and Equality Maryland [held a joint press conference](#) this week to push back against Hogan's efforts to direct public dollars to private schools.

- **House Committee Makes Further Changes to Charter School Bill**

The full Senate passed [SB 595](#), the Public Charter School Improvement Act of 2015, this week by a margin of 46-1. The House Ways and Means Education Subcommittee finished its work on the bill yesterday, and will bring a bill with a few more amendments to the full committee today and to the full House this weekend.

MSEA offered amendments to the bill that were adopted. While mostly technical and clarifying, the amendments do provide protection for local school boards, as chartering authorities, to have the final word on matters of weighted lotteries that charters use to fill incoming classes of students. Beyond the MSEA amendments, the committee rejected several other amendments, including a change at the request of the Hogan Administration to establish clearer chartering authority for the State Board of Education. MSEA strongly opposed this power for the State Board and was encouraged to see the amendment rejected.

There are clear wins for charter schools in this legislation. The ability to develop weighted lotteries to target special populations, increased flexibility and autonomy for high-performing charters, expanded access to teachers working with alternative certification, and a complete look at commensurate funding are elements of Governor Hogan's bill that have survived legislative deliberations. While MSEA opposed the bill as introduced, the work of the legislature has made a bad bill much better. And in the process, we have been successful in protecting the quality, accountability, and equity in a charter school law that supports charters without hurting traditional public schools, students, or educators.

- **News and Notes**

- *MSEA Tele-Townhall Tackles Budget, Pension, and Testing Issues*

MSEA hosted a [tele-townhall with thousands of members](#) across the state this week where these and other pressing issues before the General Assembly were discussed.

- *General Assembly Won't Vote on Paid Sick Days*

MSEA has been a part of the Working Matters Coalition for the last several years in efforts to advance legislation to require many businesses to let workers earn paid sick days each year. Unfortunately, the bill failed again this year. MSEA remains committed to providing the flexibility families need to keep sick kids home from school and prevent the impact that illness would have on other students and school staff.

- *Campaign 2016 Update*

- The Maryland General Assembly finalized a shift of the 2016 primary election calendar to April 26, 2016, three weeks later than current plans. The governor has not taken a public position on moving the primary date.
- In U.S. Senate campaign news, Congressman Chris Van Hollen earned several key endorsements recently, including Prince George's County Executive Rushern Baker and Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett. Congresswoman Donna Edwards, another candidate for the open U.S. Senate seat earned the endorsement of EMILY's List. And former delegate and gubernatorial candidate Heather Mizeur announced this week that she will not run for the Senate seat. While additional candidates may announce in the coming days and weeks, Van Hollen and Edwards are the only declared candidates so far.

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