MEMORANDUM

TO: SENATOR PERCHLIK
FROM: SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
DATE: APRIL 19, 2025
RE: BUDGET PRIORITIES

As we have taken testimony from educators, nonprofits and governmental entities we have asked those requesting dollars to send us a specific request for our review, from which we would assemble our budget request letter.

We write today with an understanding that there is not much room in the budget for additions beyond the governor's recommend and that your task will consist mostly of deciding which of dozens of worthy requests are so urgent they are funded this year. We therefore have tried to parse our requests to those we consider serious priorities for the FY '26 budget.

Education Reform Transition

The governor's recommend contains $4,000,000 to help with transition to a new system of governance and funding. We will not be moving at the speed anticipated in the administration's plan. We nevertheless recommend that you hang onto at least $1,000,000 for this purpose in FY '26, while recognizing that we will need additional dollars for that purpose in the out years.

Some of this year's $1,000,000 will help with the summer mapping commission likely to emerge from the process. including legislative per diem and experts the committee may need to hire, working through a checklist of items to be designed before whatever we seek as end product becomes operational. The Government Operations Committees will need resources for the development of wards should a map be adopted. We just can't fully envision what may be necessary, so want to retain monetary flexibility.

We emphasize that transformation of the system will require dollars in the out years, starting with the FY '27 budget year. If governance changes derive from a legislatively adopted map, dollars will be required to assist districts sort out debt and other issues. If a system is developed whereby mergers are encouraged, we will need dollars for technical assistance and merger grants, and likely dollars for the SBE to help facilitate mergers.

Finally, there was not unanimity within the committee as to the following priorities, with some emphasizing feeding children as the top priority, some opposing those programs, and some seeing funding for the state board of education as the top priority. But the majority of the committee sees the following as very important:

Budget Priorities

Building Bright Futures: $323,000 for data gathering and analysis of efficacy of millions of dollars of spending

Advance Vermont: $350,000
Career Hub – Smallish Investment, Important Resource. The $350,000 restores funding to it FY '22 and FY '23 levels

Community Schools: $1,000,000 in base funding

Child and Adult Food Program: $182,000
new dollars added to AOE child nutrition budget to build sponsor capacity for Child and Adult Care Program to draw federal dollars – Small investment, Large Return

Governor's Institute: The committee supports the request for a 3% increase, bringing the total budget item from $384,874 to $396,420

State Board of Education

Request to Senate Education Committee: $629,560
Education Committee Recommends: $206,000

$70,000 line item in AOE budget for normal annual costs
$36,000 for counsel on retainer
$50,000 for cost of rewriting either CTE rules or Special Ed rules (one in FY '26, one in FY '27)
$50,000 for legal counsel to begin multi-year project of determining which SBE rules to sunset, which to transfer to AOE and to update retained rules.
Total projected cost for multi-year project in FY '26 dollars = $375,000.

Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network

Farm to School =$1,200,000
(keep Vermont Farm to School and Early Childhood Network program alive in face of federal cuts to Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program

Adult Literacy

The committee supports the restoration of the $180,211 resulting from a calculating error, as reflected in the House passed version of the budget.

Note: We did not have time to delve into the budget requests from the state colleges system, UVM and VSAC. Our silence on these requests should not be interpreted as not being supportive.

We certainly support, at the minimum, the Governor's recommend for these three, while recognizing that anything that can be added to help the state colleges with deferred maintenance would be money well spent.