



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LEE COUNTY

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May 15, 2017

VIA HAND DELIVERY

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

RE: HB 7069

Dear Governor Scott,

On behalf of the citizens of Lee County and the Lee County School Board, we respectfully request that you veto *HB 7069 – the K-12 Education Conforming Bill*. As you know, this bill was developed as part of the budget conference process; however, most of the provisions in the bill are policy issues that have no connection to the budget. Further, the negotiations on this bill were not conducted in an open and public manner. As a result, the School Board and District staff were unable to provide meaningful comments and suggestions to our legislative delegation about how the policies enacted through this bill would impact the students, taxpayers, and citizens of Lee County.

The bill does contain certain policies with which we agree. However, due to the secretive nature of the negotiations, many objectionable policies were also included. All citizens deserve an open government in Florida. Meetings should be conducted in the open and negotiations should be public.

An example of a secretive, objectionable policy is the lack of a meaningful “self-enrichment” prohibition in the final bill with regard to charter schools and capital outlay funding. Both the House and Senate versions of the charter school capital outlay bills contained provisions that dramatically limited eligibility for capital funds or required charter school operators to prove that they were not being personally enriched through state or local tax dollars in order to receive capital outlay funding. While both of the floor bills contained those provisions, the new conference report omitted any references to these provisions. Limitations contained in both floor bills that would have prevented a not-for-profit charter school board from self-dealing with for-profit corporations and prevented exorbitant rents from being paid with tax dollars resulting in inflated profits for charter management corporations, are not included in this bill.

Other objectionable portions of HB 7069, include the “Schools of Hope” provision which steers \$140 million dollars in education funding to charter school companies that agree to turn around low-performing schools. Charter companies agreeing to take on these schools do not have to serve all students and will receive more money than traditional public schools. Instead of receiving “Schools of Hope” funding, traditional Florida public schools will receive a 0.34% increase, or roughly one-third of one percent increase in per student funding. This paltry increase comes at a time when Florida’s economy is growing by over 4% per year.

HB 7069 also places restrictions on how districts can spend federal Title I dollars, which are earmarked for schools with large populations of students on free and reduced-price lunch. The Florida Legislature is now dictating to local school districts how federal dollars can be spent for our most vulnerable students. This is an issue of local control and should be best left to local school districts to determine.

We also oppose the provision in this bill that prohibits future collective bargaining agreements from containing a methodology for automatic renewal of a teacher’s contract. Lee County has a significant teacher shortage. As a result, we have collectively bargained language with the teachers that allows for certain teachers who are meeting or exceeding our high expectations to rely on the fact that they will have a teaching position for the following school year. HB 7069 would require us to remove this language from future collective bargaining agreements. We do not believe that this serves the students, parents, or citizens of Lee County in a responsible manner. This provision was contained in a bill that was “killed” in the Senate Rules Committee, but somehow appeared in this bill. This provision would not have gained passage as a stand-alone amendment in the Senate, and it should not have been packaged into a bill tied to the budget.

There are dozens of other unfunded mandates and negative long-term policies in this bill that have been filed previously, over multiple sessions, but failed to gain support for passage. They have appeared in this bill by linking them with the budget outside of the eye of public scrutiny. Please do not let this process succeed. If it does, it will become the norm instead of the exception.

We strongly urge you to veto HB 7069. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Gregory K. Adkins, Ed.D.
Superintendent