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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Senate Passes Education Reform Legislation**

*Bill focuses on reform, transparency, and funding.*

BOSTON – **Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)** has announced that the Massachusetts Senate passed *An Act Enhancing Reform, Innovation, and Success in Education (The RISE Act)*. The bill was crafted by a small working group of Senators appointed by Senate President Rosenberg in late January to work on bringing a bill to the floor of the Senate.

The current cap for the number of charter schools in Massachusetts is at 72 Commonwealth Charter schools and 48 Horace Mann charters schools; Horace Mann charter schools are approved by the local school committee in which the charter operates, by the local collective bargaining agent, and approved by Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The bill allows for a cap lift but puts district schools and charter schools on a level playing field. The bill maintains the current statewide charter school cap but increases net school spending for charters from 18% to 23% for the lowest performing districts over the next ten years, allowing for an increase in the number of charter school seats in these districts. Beginning in fiscal year 2019, in an effort to align the funding priorities of traditional public schools and charter schools, this increase in seats will be tied to increases in Chapter 70 investments recommended by the [Foundation Budget Review Commission](#) over a seven year schedule.

"It was important to me to see that local control was a part of the bill and I was glad to co-sponsor the amendment that became part of the final bill," said Senator Gobi. "In addition, the reforms in the bill show the commitment to all students and not just the 4% currently in charter schools."

With a pending ballot question potentially on the ballot this November, the Senate bill casts a wide net, well beyond what the ballot question entails, on addressing the issue of charter schools.

The bill focuses on transparency, admission and retention of students, funding, and the charter school cap.

“This bill expands innovation for all schools and takes the lessons we have learned from 20 years of charter schools in Massachusetts and brings necessary reforms in admissions, funding, transparency, and governance, said **Senate President Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst)**. “The stakes for students in our public school systems are too high to let the answers be decided by a ballot question which, though well intentioned, only addresses the less than 10% of students currently attending or seeking seats at charter schools. The remaining over 90% of students have just as much at stake.”

The bill eliminates the cap on charter schools that specifically serve at-risk students. This will allow charter schools that serve at-risk students to immediately begin working to address the needs of this population.

The bill also seeks reforms beyond charter schools for the betterment of the over 90% of public school students in Massachusetts not currently enrolled or seeking seats in charter schools. For districts at risk of becoming underperforming, the bill provides more flexibility and autonomy for district leaders to introduce more innovation and changes to classrooms.

Additionally, to reward and incentivize in-district innovation, Horace Mann and Innovation schools may be counted towards the net school spending cap but are not limited by it, which allows for even more seats in innovative classrooms.

To create more transparency around the operations of charter schools, the bill requires public disclosure by charter schools of their finances, policies, contracts and board meetings.

During debate the Senate adopted an amendment requiring charter schools to abide by the same procurement requirements under state law that traditional public schools are required to follow.

Local school committees are granted the right to vote on whether a charter school in their district should receive public funding from the district for students that opt to enroll in the charter. If a committee voted against the charter school they could still operate, but the state would be required to provide the funding directly, rather than reimbursing the school district.

The Senate also adopted an amendment to increase data reporting by DESE to include English language learners and special education students. Amendments were also adopted to encourage the usage of teachers' aides or other paraprofessionals to provide educational support, including but not limited to tutoring, instructional assistance and parental involvement activities in priority and underperforming schools.

The bill includes requiring increased communication between charter schools and local school districts before submitting a charter school proposal to DESE. In addition, DESE would be required to reform how they handle the charter school waitlist and evaluate a proposed charter's impact on district students as part of the application process.

The bill requires a paradigm shift for how charters admit students by implementing a district wide lottery, with an opt-out provision for parents, or unified enrollment system to all students of each district. Currently, charter school lotteries are only open to those students who apply. The bill would require that all students in a district be eligible for charter schools and traditional public schools, effectively eliminating the current lottery system.

The bill also offers school districts a fair deal on funding. Reimbursement to traditional public school systems would be funded for three years to a district mitigation fund for all districts and be funded at 100% in the first year, 50% in the second, and 25% in the third year for districts that have lost students to charter schools.

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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