

**MICHIGAN HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING RE DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS 3-16-16**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Nick Ciaramitaro and I am the Director of Legislation and Public Policy for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in Michigan.

AFSCME Council 25 represents about 750 Detroit Public School employees who provide food services and critical assistance for special education students in the classroom and on buses. More than 15,000 AFSCME members live in the City of Detroit many of whom have children who attend DPS schools.

As such we are very concerned and active in improving public education in the City of Detroit. Through President Keith January of Local 345 in the DPS system, we participated in the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren and our organization fully supports the recommendations of that stakeholder task force.

It is clear, in our view, that state management of Detroit Schools has not been successful and it is time to restore local control. The State of Michigan needs to partner with local governments not punish them. Only by restoring this necessary balance will we be able to assure quality in the services that our members struggle to provide to the people we all are committed to serve.

Michigan AFSCME strongly supports a \$50 million supplemental appropriation to allow the Detroit Public Schools system to operate through the balance of the school year as we continue discussions among House Members, Senate Members, the Governor's Office and the various stakeholder groups involved in Detroit education to figure out how to improve education in Detroit. We urge you to withhold action on the balance of the bills before you. Some of the bills we believe can be amended properly. Others we oppose – but as all remain on the table we look forward to working toward a responsible solution. We pledge to work with anyone interested in achieving that result.

We are, however, particularly concerned with several provisions in the proposed House package:

- As I'm sure you expect, AFSCME opposes the radical changes in PERA proposed in HB 5387. Many of these provisions extend concepts that up to now have only applied to instructional staff and would not work among non-instructional employees. Further they undo compromises reached within only a few short years here in this legislature particularly on the increasingly suspect issue of outsourcing. Some contend they are justified in the face of sick outs that occurred last year. Our organization did not participate in those actions but would note that the participants were not engaged in an organizing strike, were not engaged in a strike for a contract or for additional wages or benefits but fulfilled the role of whistle blowers for conditions in a number of schools that endangered not only employees but students. Penalties for public employee strikes already exist in law and changes do not belong in this package.
- AFSCME opposes efforts to force new employees into Tier 2 of the MPSERS plan. As the Office of Retirement Services has demonstrated, such action would force additional costs on the system, and therefore either the State or the rest of the school districts, and would eliminate any secure retirement for those retirees. Again, this issue does not belong in this package.
- Finally, AFSCME urges a return to local control of the local school district as soon as possible. The Detroit Public Schools have not fared any better under state control, emergency fiscal management, or emergency manager control fiscally or academically. Local accountability and local involvement is critical to a properly functioning school board. While additional state dollars warrant additional state supervision of the use of those dollars, the method and operation of the school district should be accountable directly to the people who live in the school district.

Thank you for your consideration.