



THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education
Appropriations Subcommittee on Pre-K - 12 Education
Banking and Insurance
Education
Environmental Preservation and Conservation

SENATOR GARY M. FARMER, JR.

34th District

June 13, 2017

Governor Rick Scott,

As you are well aware on Monday May 8, the State Legislature passed HB 7069. This bill, which faced bipartisan opposition in the State Senate, has the potential to devastate Florida's public education system.

This dreadful piece of legislation, if signed into law, would dramatically reduce the ability of school districts across the state to devote resources towards improving our public education. HB 7069 would force school districts to give an even split of locally derived capital outlay funds to charter schools. This would cut \$13 million a year from Broward County's budget alone. In Palm Beach County, officials have predicted that this piece of legislation could impact districts so harshly that districts may see their credit ratings decrease, as mandated spending rises. This funding would be on top of PECO dollars that charters have regularly been receiving from general revenue.

What is further troubling about the proposed new capital outlay mandate is that it would allocate funds for charter schools to construct privately owned buildings. This will allow private management companies to build facilities for charter schools, which will then revert to private ownership in the event that the charter school either closes down or relocates. While we had language in the Senate education bill which would have prohibited the use of capital outlay funds for individual or corporate enrichment, this language was not included in HB 7069.

This bill would also mandate that traditional public schools allow charter schools to use their facilities at a deeply discounted rate, which does not reflect the fair market value of the property. It would allow charter schools to use vacant space in existing district facilities. This poses a major potential problem, as it would severely limit a school district's ability to adequately plan for future growth.

HB 7069 also creates potentially harmful exemptions for charter schools with regard to zoning laws. This bill would allow charter schools to bypass land use or zoning requirements of local jurisdictions. This could harm both communities and students, by placing students in locations that are not suited for schools, and causing local complications such as negatively altering traffic patterns. There is a reason zoning laws are localized, and no industry should be exempt from this oversight designed to preserve and protect neighborhoods.

REPLY TO:

- Broward College Campus, 111 East Las Olas Boulevard, Suite 913, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301 (954) 467-4227
- 216 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5034

Senate's Website: www.flsenate.gov

JOE NEGRON
President of the Senate

ANITERE FLORES
President Pro Tempore

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In addition to the negative policy effects of HB 7069, the process through which this bill was passed also raises some serious transparency issues. One of the highlights of your time as governor of this great state has been your commitment to making Florida one of the most transparent states in the nation. While there are many issues which you and I fundamentally disagree upon, making sure that the people have a clear view of our government during every step in the process, is something on which we see eye to eye. Unfortunately, the process by which HB 7069 was passed through both the House and the Senate was anything but transparent.

Until May 5, HB 7069 was a bill which dealt entirely with the Best and Brightest Scholarship Program. However, that afternoon the bill was fundamentally changed into a 278-page amendment that slashes funding for struggling schools and requires school districts to pay for charter school projects that they cannot afford. This amendment also included provisions that were the subject of some 55 other bills, the vast majority of which either had been voted down in committee or had stalled. The amendment also hijacked unrelated issues, such as recess and Gardiner Scholarships for students with special abilities, in a blatant attempt to borrow support. That may be the most offensive part of this process, as these issues enjoyed broad, bipartisan support – unlike the other controversial provisions of the bill.

This massive amendment was not released to the public until it was proposed during the appropriations conference committee meeting, leaving no time for public review or comment before it was agreed upon. This bill is a textbook example of a failure in government transparency.

Governor Scott, on behalf of my constituents in Broward County as well as parents and students across the state I implore you to please exercise your authority to veto HB 7069. While there are small pockets of good policy hidden within this bill, it is a monstrosity when coupled with the multitude of bad policies that have been included. Understanding the bad policy that is contained in this bill and the lack of transparency employed in its passage I urge you to please veto HB 7069.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary M. Farmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Gary M. Farmer
District 34