

April 8, 2025

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Massachusetts State House, Room 212  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair  
House Committee on Ways and Means  
Massachusetts State House, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Emergency Relief Funding for Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee(GDRSC), as well as the parent of two children in the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. I have previously written to you regarding the significant inadequacies of the Chapter 70 funding formula, and today, I wish to express how dire the financial situation is in my District, as a result of these inadequacies. Without immediate action and increased support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, there will be catastrophic consequences for the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District.

Groton-Dunstable has been in “hold harmless” status for many years, which has resulted in essentially flat state funding. To illustrate how state aid has not kept up with district growth, in FY08, Chapter 70 aid made up approximately 35% of our funding, while the combined town assessments made up approximately 57%. In FY25, Chapter 70 aid dropped to just 24% of our funding, while the combined local assessments have increased to 72%. The increased financial strain that this places on our taxpayers is unsustainable, and the alternative of continuously cutting our budget has had, and will continue to have, profound negative implications for the quality of education that our district will be able to provide.

Over the past 15 years, there have been many years that the cost of providing level service to our students has exceeded the ability of the towns to pay their assessments within the levy. In these years, school and town officials have worked together to determine how to address the shortfall, whether through overrides of proposition 2 ½, or reductions to the municipal budget, which was helpful to the schools, however has left big holes in our town services. In many other years the solution to make up the shortfall was to make deep cuts to the school budget.

In FY25, Groton and Dunstable sought overrides in order to fund the school’s level service budget. Both overrides failed and the District was forced to make \$2.7 million dollars worth of

reductions. We lost counselors, nurses, classroom teachers, administrators, special education teachers and team chairs, interventionists and administrative assistants. Each of the reductions represents lost opportunities for our current and future students. As one of my fellow school committee members often says: a child is only in 3rd grade once. They have one chance at each grade, and at each stage of learning and development. In an underfunded district, every year that goes by results in children attending school with fewer resources and supports available to them than the class that came before them. School will no longer be a place students want to go and the heartbreaking truth is that after a certain point, many students will be unreachable.

This has become the reality in Groton-Dunstable. After multiple years in a row of cuts, our class sizes are increasing while course offerings are decreasing. There are fewer and fewer ways to connect with and inspire our students and ultimately to foster a love of learning within them. Our staff is talented, courageous and dedicated to their students. They do everything they can to ensure that students receive the support they need, but ultimately, with larger caseloads and class sizes, there is only so much they can do. To make a bad situation worse, the morale and mental health of our staff is suffering. We are asking them to do more with less, at a time when students are coming to school with profound needs of their own.

For our FY26 budget, we are once again in a position of requiring an override to fund our budget. As a school committee member, I have been doing everything I can to try to spread the word to our community members that the needs of the district are critical. As a district, we cannot afford to endure more reductions right now. Ultimately, I don't know if we will be successful in passing our overrides, but I do know this: If by some chance, we are fortunate enough to get the overrides passed this year, it will not happen again. Voters may support it once, but they will not support it twice and our projections for next year already show that our expected increase will exceed the towns' ability to pay. If the overrides fail, we will endure another year of cuts and the towns have already communicated to us that they would not support even trying for another override next year. We need help urgently.

I understand that the idea of reforming the funding formula is complex and will take time. I recognize that there is no easy or quick fix here, but in the meantime, our communities despair, our staff and students are hurting, and will continue to hurt without additional support from the state. Accordingly, I implore your committee to support the following proposals, as they will offer some much needed relief while the Legislature determines the long term plan for the Chapter 70 funding formula:

1. Fund the Special Education Circuit Breaker Reimbursement at 90% with a lower threshold. (H.691/S.430, *An Act relative to the long-term fiscal health and sustainability of special education in the Commonwealth*);
2. Increase regional transportation reimbursement to the full 100% (H.697/S.328, *An Act*

- relative to full funding of regional school district transportation);*
3. Fund sliding scale mental health supports for all Districts (*H.544/S.369, An Act to establish the Whole Child Grant Program*);
  4. Increase charter school reimbursement (*H.577/S.389, An Act honoring the Commonwealth's commitment to public school districts*)

Again, I realize that these matters are not easy, and that there are many needs that you must consider throughout the Commonwealth. I ask that in your deliberations, you remember and consider the needs of the 2,305 current students and 351 employees of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. They are counting on you.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Very truly yours,

Lacey M. McCabe  
Chair, Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee