

Michigan Chamber of Commerce Opposes Seriously Flawed Education Spending Mandate

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce today announced its opposition to legislation (Senate Bill 246) introduced last week by State Senator Bob Emerson (D-Flint) that would provide for automatic annual increases in government spending on K-12 school districts, community colleges, and state universities.

"The Michigan Chamber supports adequately funding K-16 education. However, like Governor Granholm and State Board of Education President Kathleen Strauss, we cannot support a bill that would earmark funding for education without identifying a revenue source," said Rich Studley, Senior Vice President of Government Relations for the Michigan Chamber.

"Worse yet, Senate Bill 246 is quite literally a blank check for dramatically increased government spending," added Studley. "On pages 2-3 of the bill, where hundreds of millions of tax dollars are to be appropriated for education, the specific dollar amounts were left blank, apparently to be filled in later.

"Another serious problem with Senate Bill 246 is that, although proponents claim to be committed to improving student achievement, the bill has no provision relating to education quality," continued Studley. "In fact, neither the words 'student achievement' nor 'education quality' can be found in the proposed legislation."

In response to news media reports that the Michigan Education Association and other supporters of Senate Bill 246 plan to turn this bill into a ballot proposal in 2006, Michigan Chamber Senior Vice President of Political Affairs, Bob LaBrant, said: "Additional earmarking of funds in the state constitution restricts the ability of the legislature to make necessary decisions about the proper allocation of the state's financial resources in response to changes in the economy and the various needs of Michigan's citizens.

"In November 2002, 66 percent of Michigan voters overwhelmingly said 'NO' to Proposal 4 to earmark certain state revenue for health care. We're confident that in 2006 a self-serving education spending mandate would meet a similar fate," said LaBrant.

"In 2002, university presidents, community college boards and local school boards from across the state were actively involved in the campaign against Proposal 4, arguing persuasively that earmarking of funds weakens legislative oversight and reduces accountability. We encourage responsible educators to be consistent and refrain from supporting Senate Bill 246 or a petition drive based on the same concept," LaBrant concluded.

The Michigan Chamber is a statewide business organization which represents more than 6,500 employers, trade associations and local chambers of commerce. The Michigan Chamber was established in 1959 to be an advocate for Michigan's job providers in the legislative, political and legal process.

SOURCE: Michigan Chamber of Commerce

CONTACT: Rich Studley or Bob LaBrant of Michigan Chamber of Commerce,
+1-517-371-2100

Web site: <http://www.michamber.com/>

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