

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coalition leaders say House measures fall far short, renew support for Senate plan

DETROIT – Coalition leaders today said Republican legislation passed late last week in the Michigan House of Representatives falls far short of the bipartisan, quality-focused package that was approved by the Senate in March, but acknowledged some steps forward.

“The House bills don’t include any reforms that will improve education,” said Reverend Wendell Anthony, Coalition co-chair, Fellowship Chapel and president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP. “Under the House bills, the state still controls public schools in Detroit – and as such, the failure is still on their watch.”

“The taxpayers of Michigan deserve to know that \$600 million won’t be squandered,” said Angela Reyes, Coalition co-chair and executive director of Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation. “The House bills don’t get us where we need to be; they simply reset the status quo. To see sustained improvement in Detroit schools, we need a centralized coordinating commission to oversee a quality choice system.”

Though troubled with the flaws in the House legislation, co-chairs did acknowledge steps toward the Coalition’s Choice Is Ours recommendations, including: the state taking responsibility for DPS’ debt, phasing out the controversial Education Achievement Authority, and returning control of Detroit schools to an elected local board.

“In terms of the finance piece of the House legislation, although we need more startup money for the new school district, the measures go a long way toward addressing our recommendation. We were hoping for the long ball, but got a solid triple instead,” said Coalition Co-chair and Walbridge CEO John Rakolta, Jr.

“Similar to the resolution of DPS debt, we now have both chambers of the Michigan Legislature and Gov. Snyder agreeing with what Detroiters have been arguing for years: Detroiters need to run Detroit schools. That’s a big step forward for our community,” said Coalition Co-chair Tonya Allen. “However, the legislation doesn’t go far enough. The state is still too involved in the management of Detroit schools via the Financial Review Commission and the State School Reform Office, and they will be held accountable for the progress – or lack thereof – in Detroit education.”

Co-chair David Hecker, president of AFT Michigan AFL-CIO, expressed frustration with the actions against teachers in the House legislation. “We have a shortage of 180 teachers in

Detroit right now, and natural retirement could double that figure. This capricious legislation will further harm DPS' ability to attract and retain talent."

"Michigan ranks near the bottom on educational performance," Allen stated. "We're 41st in the nation on fourth-grade reading scores, and we will continue to fall if we don't take a serious look at our education policies."

The Senate garnered momentous support for its package over the past several weeks, including endorsements from Detroit parents, leaders of Detroit Public Schools, several local charter school operators, Gov. Rick Snyder, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, Business Leaders for Michigan, the Detroit Regional Chamber, Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, New Detroit Inc., United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Ric Devore of PNC Bank, Jim Murray of AT&T Michigan, Frank Venegas of Ideal Group and Matt Simoncini of Lear Corporation.

Coalition leaders expressed dismay that the bipartisan approach that it worked hard to develop with the Senate over the past year has now been jettisoned by the maneuverings of the House Republican leadership.

"The Michigan Senate put forth a plan that put children above politics, and they did it in a bipartisan fashion," said Rev. Anthony. "It was a good model for Michigan policymakers when tackling tough issues. It's a shame that the House, in its disrespect for Detroit, is allowing all of that hard work to go to waste."

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren formed on December 11, 2014 as an independent, diverse cross-section of Detroit leaders who came together to make recommendations to improve the city's education system. Its first report, The Choice Is Ours, focused on how the state could help. Most of our recommendations were enacted. Now, the Coalition is focused on actions Detroiters can take locally to strengthen the city's schools.

The Coalition's leadership teams are made up of approximately 150 community members. The Coalition is led by six co-chairs: Tonya Allen, Skillman Foundation president & CEO; Rev. Wendell Anthony, Fellowship Chapel and president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP; David Hecker, president of AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO; John Rakolta Jr., CEO of Walbridge; Mark Reuss, executive vice president, global product development, purchasing and supply chain of General Motors; and Angela Reyes, executive director of Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation.

The Coalition's 2017 report, Our School, Our Moment, is available at www.DetroitEducationCoalition.org.

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