**Statement of the MA Association of School Committees Relative to H-3632**

**Presented at the Local Government Advisory Commission**

**April 9, 2019**

We find many areas of concern that need to be discussed and resolved before we could withdraw our objections to the governor’s proposal for Innovation Partnership Zones, or whatever name might be in use at any given time for the model of school turnaround.

First, this proposal effectively authorizes mini-charter schools that, based on the language of the bill, could be proposed by teachers or parents without regard to the greater interests of the entire school district. Moreover, should the school committee not agree, the bill gives the commissioner the authority to set them up without the consent of the city, town or region and keep them for at least five years. Remember, advocates for privatization lost Question 2 – overwhelmingly.

So, without the ability to expand formal charters, we start to see alternatives that look like charters, run like charters, and which are not fully accountable to others, just like charters. We do not think our constituents will take kindly to this.

Second, since we have already authorized innovation schools for almost ten years, we see this new bill providing an option that is less attractive to cities, towns and regions and another opportunity for the state to intervene in more schools, or to apply pressure to districts to submit to intervention earlier than under current law.

Third, given the potentially coercive nature of the adoption of an Innovation Partnership Zone – which historically was the state saying, “give us your school, or we will put it into receivership,” we have reservations about giving the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education the authority to impose such a zone upon a city, town or region without its consent, including situations where the local officials may have rejected a proposal to approve a program.

Fourth, given the success that some of our districts have already had in turning around schools that have been labeled or sanctioned, we wonder if the governor’s proposal will undermine the best efforts of current local administrators to work with their communities and teachers, independent of state coercion, to make successes of their schools without someone assuming decision making authority.

We have already been underfunded for the past 18 years and overregulated at an escalating pace for the past 26 years under Education Reform. Look at the detailed nature of this bill – do we really need more of this kind of micro-management?

Fifth, the governor’s plan could create one or more budget centers, sets of school policy, centers for purchasing and procurement, collective bargaining arrangements – all within the same district, and authorizing a third party to apportion funds without regard to the impact on the rest of the school district or the input of local taxpayers and their representatives.

Sixth, the bill would turn over disputes of basic questions of policy, budget, and operations to a binding arbitration process, thus handing key decision making over to a third party for the first time.

And finally, the law calls for a five-year plan. Given that DESE has rarely relinquished authority it has taken from local government, what assurance do we have that successful schools will ever be released from an Innovation Zone. During the five-year period, where will parents go to redress legitimate grievances?

We already have some successful models from the original innovation schools, which allow flexibility under local oversight and question why we might need another, more complicated arrangement.

We can only imagine the number of so-called “school turnaround experts” with their dark money and ambitions to profit, who are lurking at the gates, drooling over the prospects of winning a management contract to turn around a school, and hoping that the public will not take note of the flawed record of their fellow consultants that hangs over them.

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