



TESTIMONY ON HB 152 – Rep. G. Branae
House Education
January 19, 2007

Chairman Jore and members of the committee:

For the record, I am Pete Carparelli, Executive Director of the Montana Quality Education Coalition.

I appear on behalf of MQEC and as a proponent of HB 152 sponsored by Representative Branae.

HB 152 deals with matters that are at the heart of the goal of the Montana Quality Education Coalition. That is procurement of adequate stable on-going funding for quality public K–12 education as defined in 20-9-309 MCA passed by the Montana Legislature in 2005 and as assured by the Montana Constitution. MQEC will evaluate legislation proposed during the 2007 Legislature, and will support such legislation that adequately addresses one or more of the requirements of 20-9-309 MCA and meets the state's constitutional obligation to adequately fund a system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools. It will also provide information to assist the Legislative and Executive branches in its considerations of proposed legislation dealing with Montana's public elementary and secondary schools. In fact, MQEC has delivered to each of you a copy of its report entitled, Estimating the Cost of Adequate Education in Montana. We hope that the data in that report will guide you in fashioning legislation that moves us on the path toward adequate funding.

MQEC honors the Court's recognition of the state's right to phase in any remedy over time, and MQEC will support legislation as part of a phase-in remedy that explicitly

prescribes a cost-based approach and leads to a defined funding goal over a specified period of time.

MQEC will oppose legislation that is not consistent with 20-9-309 MCA and the Court's decision.

Today, MQEC supports passage of HB 152, "An Act Applying the Inflationary Adjustment to the Basic and Per-ANB Entitlements....." because it has determined that the bill addresses more than one of the tests of adequate funding and/or quality education, and is a necessary part of any phase-in of adequate funding.

First and foremost, HB 152 addresses Section (4) (b) (iii) of 20-9-309 MCA requiring the legislature to "establish a funding formula that is self-executing and includes a mechanism for annual inflationary adjustments." The Office of Public Instruction requests amendments to current sections of law in order to present its inflationary adjustments to the several entitlements, and we urge you to move this bill forward with no less than the level of adjustments requested therein.

We also urge you to consider amendments to this bill and/or to others dealing with inflationary adjustments, so that a more contemporaneous inflationary factor can be used in the future to calculate adjustments for school funding.

Second, MQEC supports HB 152 because it makes a significant and realistic adjustment to the quality educator payment. We believe that this adjustment is one strong contributor to the effort to achieve overall funding adequacy.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, please note that MQEC has previously testified before the Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee that it believes that the discrepancy between elementary ANB and secondary ANB is not cost-based, therefore not based on educationally relevant factors, and does not adequately reflect the cost of delivering quality education at the elementary level. We would add here today

that we believe the same is true for the basic entitlements for high school and elementary or K-12 district elementary programs. Under current law, therefore, these may not reflect the cost of delivering quality education as defined in 20-9-309. We recognize, however, that it is not proper to address changes to this element of the funding formula in a bill providing for inflationary adjustments, but we feel obligated to point out that this flaw in the basic foundation of school funding, as provided elsewhere in statute impacts the Legislature's ability to address the Court's directive and the Legislature's own codification of law that adequate funding must be based on the cost of educationally relevant factors. As a result, the inflationary adjustments apply to an inadequately funded entitlement.

Chairman Jore and members of the committee, we urge you to move this bill forward with no less than the level of adjustments requested by Rep. Branae and the Office of Public Instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. Thank you, Rep. Branae and Superintendent McCulloch for bringing HB 152 to the Legislature.