Montanans united for kids

MONTANA
QUALITY EDUCATION
COALITION

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
EXHIBIT NO. 5
DATE 1-8-07
BILL NO. SB 56

TESTIMONY ON SB 56 – Sen. Don Ryan
Senate Education and Cultural Resources
January 8, 2007

Chairman Ryan and members of the committee:

For the record, I am Pete Carparelli, Executive Director of the Montana Quality Education Coalition. I live and work in Helena, MT.

I appear as a proponent of SB 56 sponsored by Senator Ryan.

As you know, the goal of the Montana Quality Education Coalition is adequate stable on-going funding for 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. Passage of SB 56 that is before you today can be one (another) very practical step forward to that goal as it provides a very important correction of current law.

As you know, funding is provided by the Federal Government to address the educationally relevant factor of special needs – most predominantly needs associated with socio-economic disadvantage and a wide range of learning and developmental disabilities. Current law 20-9-501 MCA, does not account for the possibility that direct services to our most needy children might be reduced by the amount of funds that would be diverted to pay retirement costs of the professionals and para-professionals who serve those children. That very scenario has, indeed, played out in many of our schools across the state.

SB 56 demonstrates the Legislature's intent to honor the legitimate costs of addressing the educationally relevant factors that are defined in 20-9-309, Sections 2 (b) and 3 (d) and (e), those dealing with the special needs of students across our state. Passage of SB

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56 is again one incremental step in meeting the State's obligation to adequately fund quality K-12 education in Montana.

SB 56 is also good public policy. It recognizes the statutorily established factor of local control of publicly funded schools. Locally elected school trustees may judge that in their particular situation they can provide vital services to special populations of students and still use the Federal funds to pay the cost of retirement contributions of its employees paid by federal funds, or these locally elected trustees may deem that services to special populations of students would be diluted by doing so. In the latter case, the school trustees would utilize the county retirement levy.

If the local citizenry disagreed with either approach, it could make its wishes known, and even exercise its democratic franchise to make a change in local policy. Local control.

Chairman Ryan and members of the committee, I suggest to you that SB 56 is good law and good public policy as it promotes the Legislature's intent to support quality public K-12 education.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. Thank you, Senator Ryan for bringing SB 23 to the Legislature.