

September 24, 2015

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.
Governor's Office of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Governor Hogan,

As public education advocates and representatives of Maryland's parents and educators working together to ensure the highest quality of education for all of our state's children, we write to ask you to release the \$68 million in Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI) funding allocated in the Maryland General Assembly FY2016 budget. The funding would be directed to 13 of the state's largest school districts, serving more than 80% of the state's student population. It is our hope that in light of an improved fiscal climate, you will reconsider your decision to withhold this funding for the sake of the progress that we collectively hope our students will make this school year.

On Monday, September 21, the Maryland Board of Revenue Estimates increased projections of revenue by \$212.2 million over the next two fiscal years. On top of a fund balance of \$295 million in the last fiscal year, these projections place the state on a much stronger course than was known during the 2015 General Assembly session or in May when you announced you would not release \$68 million in GCEI funding. While we appreciate your concern for addressing structural deficits, our state's long-term expenditures would not be affected by releasing the currently allocated but unspent GCEI funds.

In addition to the improving economic climate and dramatic increase in state funds, we make this additional request because we have clear evidence of what the GCEI cuts have done to the schools and students affected by them. We now see larger class sizes in several counties, including Howard and Montgomery. Frederick County made several difficult cuts to important programs, including the elimination of freshman sports at many of its schools. Anne Arundel County cut from its budget for special education services. These are just a few examples of the negative consequences that our schools face when the state does not fully fund public education—as the GCEI jurisdictions of Baltimore City and Baltimore, Calvert, Carroll, Charles, Kent, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, and St. Mary's counties have also experienced.

We do not need to choose between our children's education and our educators' pensions. The State Pension and Retirement System has made it crystal clear that the General Assembly cannot legally dip into the pension fund to fund other priorities—and that the governor's office does not have the ability to transfer the withheld \$68 million in GCEI funding to the pension fund. That funding now sits, untouchable and unable to help our students and citizens. Fortunately, our pension system is, in fact, on the road to fiscal health after returning to full actuarial funding seven years earlier than previously planned, helping to ensure more consistent yearly payments in future years.

The children in our public schools deserve a full commitment from their leaders as they work to do well in school and grow into our next generation. Such support is not only fiscally possible, but is a prudent investment in the future of our state and our continued ability to attract families and businesses to Maryland.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Maryland
Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Teachers Union
League of Women Voters
Maryland Education Coalition
Maryland Out of School Time Network
Maryland PTA
Maryland State Education Association