



Representative Roman C. Benavente

House of Representatives, 18th Northern Marianas Legislature

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■ COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 18-112
DATE: June 18, 2014
RE: H.L.I. NO. 18-12

■ Saipan & Northern
Islands Legislative
Delegation

The Honorable Joseph P. Deleon Guerrero
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Eighteenth Northern Marianas
Commonwealth Legislature
Capitol Hill
Saipan, MP 96950

■ COMMITTEE ON
Natural Resources

Dear Mr. Speaker:

■ COMMITTEE ON
Health and Welfare

Your Committee on Education, to which House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 was referred, entitled:

■ COMMITTEE ON
Public Utilities,
Transportation, and
Communications

“To amend Article XV, Section 1 (e) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to increase guaranteed funding of the Public School System from fifteen percent to twenty-five percent.”

begs leave to report as follows:

I. RECOMMENDATION:

After considerable discussion and deliberation on the initiative, your Committee recommends that the House pass House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 in its current form.

HOUSE CLERK'S OFFICE

RECEIVED BY

DATE 6/26/14 TIME 12:20 pm

II. ANALYSIS:

A. Purpose:

The purpose of House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 is to amend Article XV, Section 1 (e) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to increase guaranteed funding of the Public School System from fifteen percent to twenty-five percent.

B. Committee Findings:

Your Committee finds that Article XV, Section 1 (e) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands reads:

“The public elementary and secondary education system shall be guaranteed an annual budget of not less than fifteen percent of the general revenues of the Commonwealth. The budgetary appropriation may not be reprogrammed for other purposes, and any unencumbered fund balance at the end of a fiscal year shall be available for reappropriation.”

Your Committee finds that the guaranteed funding level of fifteen percent for the Public School System was established in 1985, a time when fifteen percent was adequate enough to fund our Public School System. In recent years funding for public education in other jurisdictions of the United States has changed and risen. Funding has risen due to factors such as the increase of diverse student population and the vital need for public schools to provide rigorous curriculum in a broad range of subject areas, well-trained teachers, programs and assistive technologies that aid in promoting higher learning.

Your Committee also finds that House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 helps assuage the uncertainty of funding that prohibits future planning. Guaranteed adequate funding assists the Public School System foster student success by giving the educational institution the additional support it needs to provide programs and services that are appropriate to each child’s educational needs. Our children should be provided with every opportunity to be knowledgeable in our ever changing society.

Your Committee further finds that over the years the Legislature has provided the Public School System with funding of 25 to 33 percent of the general revenues of the Commonwealth. House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 aims to change the guaranteed funding of the Public School System from fifteen percent to twenty-five percent, a funding percentage that the Legislature has graciously been providing over the years.

Therefore, your Committee recommends that the House pass House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 in its current form.

C. Public Comments:

Comment was received from:

- Ms. Dr. Rita A. Sablan, Ed.D., Commissioner of Education.

The public comment that was received appreciates and supports the intent of House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12.

D. Legislative History:

House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 was introduced by Representative Roman C. Benavente on November 15, 2013 and was referred to the House Standing Committee on Education and the House Standing Committee on Ways and Means for disposition.

E. Cost Benefit:

The enactment of House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 will incur additional costs to the CNMI government for its placement on the ballot for ratification at the next general election as well as restrict 25% of the entire CNMI government annual budget. However, ensuring that our children receive the best possible education will heavily outweigh such cost.

III. CONCLUSION:


Your Committee recommends that the House pass House Legislative Initiative No. 18-12 in its current form.

June 18, 2014

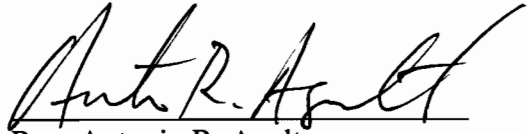
RE: H.L.I. No. 18-12

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Respectfully submitted,



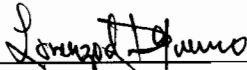
Rep. Roman C. Benavente
Chairman



Rep. Antonio R. Agulto
Vice Chairman



Rep. Trenton B. Conner
Member



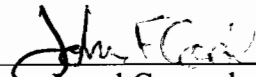
Rep. Lorenzo I. Deleon Guerrero
Member

Rep. Teresita A. Santos
Member



Rep. Roman A. Tebuteb
Member

Reviewed by:



House Legal Counsel

Attachment: Letter dated June 2, 2014 by Commissioner of Education.



STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands — *Public School System*

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June 2, 2014

Representative Roman C. Benavente
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education and Welfare
Eighteenth Northern Marianas Legislature
P.O. Box 500586
Saipan, MP 96950

RECEIVED
DATE BY 06/03/14 RB

RB

Subject: **HOUSE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE 18-12**, "To Amend Article XV, Section 1 (e) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island to Increase Guaranteed Funding of the Public School System from Fifteen Percent to Twenty-Five Percent."

Dear Chairman Benavente:

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) explicitly guarantees a compulsory free public education in our Constitution, affirming one of our founding beliefs that an educated citizenry is both vital and critical to the success, economic growth and the future of our commonwealth. Under the CNMI Constitution, public education is protected because of the intended permanence and protection from vagaries of actions and or affairs.

With this, we extend our gratitude of your interest to assist our Public School System (PSS) with the proposed House Legislative Initiative 18-12 (HLI 18-12). This initiative will certainly support PSS to continue its major effort to implement its vision, mission, goals and *Strategic Priorities PLUS* in putting our *Students First*.

Over the years the PSS has seen an increase of student enrollment, has seen a progressive change in curriculum and instruction, has seen rigorous requirements for classroom teachers, school counselors and school administrators, and has seen student participation in various competitions at the regional and national level. And as we forge ahead, we continue to find ways to support and provide for educational opportunities in every child's needs to meet his or her educational goal.

Student learning is continually reinforced by our commitment to guide our children make a mark in their desire to succeed. The reality, however, is that even with meager state funding for public education, we have worked hard to advance our school district. PSS has

STUDENTS FIRST

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been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, by the Department of Interior, and by AdvancED (the accreditation body of North Central Association) for our accomplishments.

This brings to light an ongoing conversation of how our school system continue to struggle with inadequate funding support in addressing our increasing student-teacher ratio (burgeoning class sizes), aging facilities, growing need for sufficient services, and other pressing factors that impact their abilities to avail for opportunities to succeed in education.

There is sustained desire and commitment by all of our public education stakeholders that include our school administrators, faculty and staff, parents, and advocates to help foster student success. We continue to elevate the level of classroom support and assistance in classroom learning despite the changing and unpredictable educational landscape that is beset with growing cost of classroom learning and other inadequacies.

The amendment proposed through HLI 18-12 changes the funding level of PSS from 15% to 25%. This initiative both guarantees PSS the funding support it deserved, and assuage the uncertainty of funding that prohibits our school district from planning for its future — for the future of the children of this Commonwealth, the future economic workforce.

We remain committed in our belief that education is key to a healthy and prosperous island community.

But given how the CNMI government relies with how much baseline revenue it generates, the fact is there remains a disparity in funding for public education. What stands in the way is even with funding inequity there is a growing need for most of the children of this Commonwealth to attend our Saipan, Tinian and Rota public schools and Head Start Centers.

The school district is in a competitive disadvantage on many areas because of a shoe-string funding. We struggle to stretch our local resources to maintain, operate and secure our nineteen (19) public schools and ten (10) Head Start Centers.

We are continually threatened with an increasing and expensive utility rates primarily the cost of electricity.

This hurts everyone, including and most importantly the children of this commonwealth and continue to threaten their future. In order to reverse this, we strongly support the passage of this legislative initiative and have laid out the following report for our consideration:

The current budget of PSS for fiscal year 2014 shows an appropriation of \$32,190,464. A huge portion of this funding is dedicated towards personnel salaries and benefits of our 808 personnel who works and serves a student population of approximately 10,464 on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

Table 1.1 below gives you a quick snapshot of how this amount is distributed within the Public School System.

Table 1.1 Budget FY2014

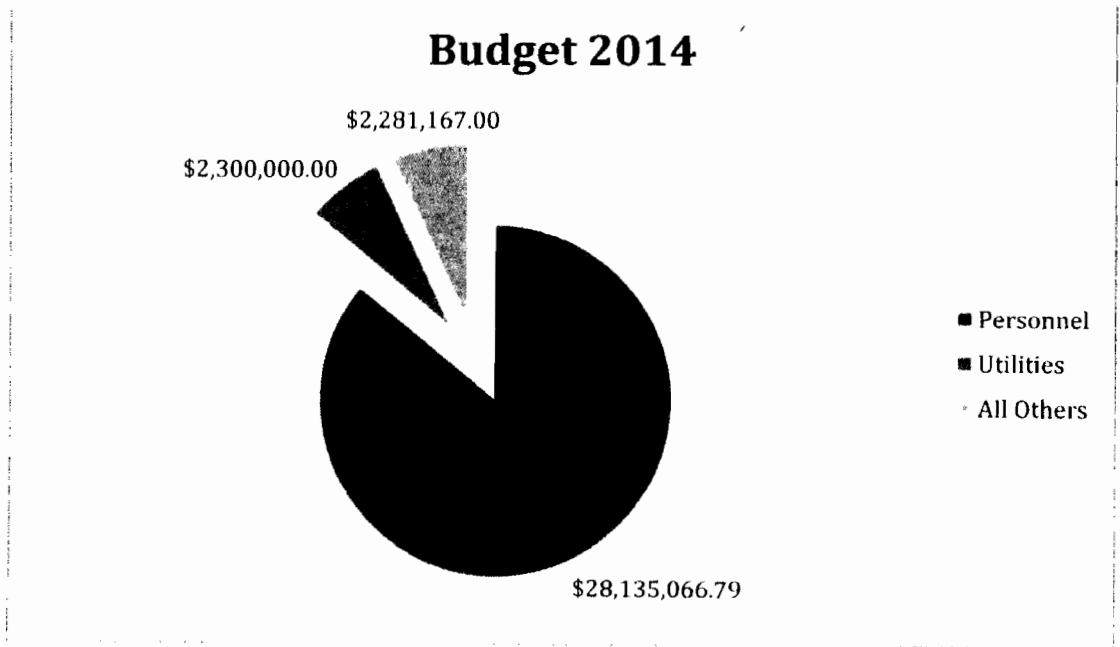
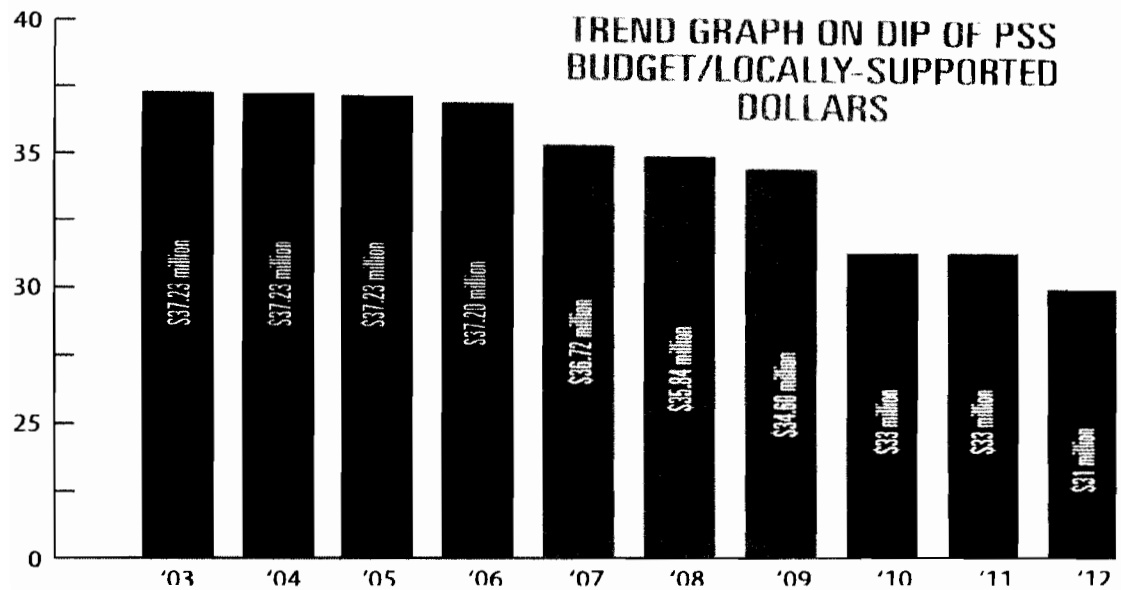


Table 1.2 below gives you a glimpse of how PSS has been locally funded since fiscal 2003.



According to a May 2013 report released by United States Census Bureau of its annual survey/reporting on Public Education Financing in the nation, the national average or spending per child/per pupil expenditure is \$10,560 as of Fiscal 2011. The federal report notes that FY 2011 data “marked the first decrease in per student public education spending since the U.S. Census Bureau began collecting data on an annual basis in 1977.”

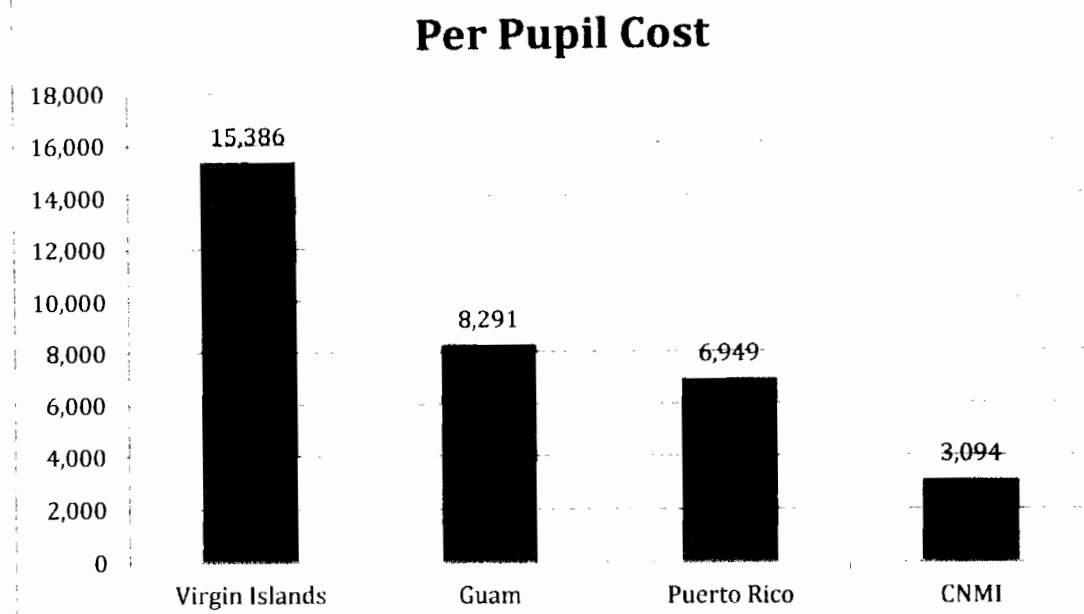
The CNMI PSS’ spending, based on local funding appropriations varies between \$3,700 in Fiscal 1997 to \$4,962 in Fiscal 2009.

A 2009 report for all U.S. Territories and Insular Area, notes that the per-pupil local spending for CNMI public schools’ students is the second lowest in the entire United States, second only to Samoa.

In contrast, within the territories the highest in the U.S. Virgin islands with per-pupil spending at \$15, 386, followed by Guam at \$8, 291 and Puerto Rico at \$6,949.

Table 1.3 is a table that gives us a succinct look the CNMI government's per-pupil spending if compared to our neighboring island territories.

Table 1.3 Per Pupil Cost



As PSS strives to be a world-class school district, the reality is that its funding capacity does not allow for it to be competitive nor does it allow for it to provide for the utmost 21st century classroom environment. Research has indicated that if our students are to be globally competitive, then we must invest in our school district. We believe that HLI 18-12 to amend the guaranteed funding level of the PSS from 15% to 25% will help the PSS to achieve these goals.

The increase in the annual funding level will help improve our education programs and infrastructure in the four (4) main areas: 1) Full – Time, Full – Day Kindergarten program, 2) Classroom Instruction Materials and Instructional Technology, 3) Class-size Reduction, and 4) Continuous School Improvement and Modernization of School Facilities.

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A. Full-Time, Full-Day Kindergarten

Research shows that early education provides the foundation for children's success in school. Participation in a kindergarten program can have a tremendous impact on a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Pre-K Coalition, 2014). The recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts, math and science has begun to focus greater attention on a broader continuum of learning from Kinder and Grades 1 through 12.

This will be a fruition of an initiative put forward in 2004 by the State Board of Education (Board) (shepherded by Board Chairman Herman T. Guerrero) and the PSS Leadership, for all public elementary campuses on Saipan, Tinian and Rota to offer a compulsory Kindergarten program.

In 2004, House Bill 14-092 or the Universal Kindergarten Act of 2004 was introduced. Said legislation did not identify the funding source to carry the mandate of the Act and noting the current financial condition of the government, the Board called off its support due to funding problem.

Our public schools currently provide for a half-day free Kindergarten classes for five year olds. This current School-Year 2013-2014, the Kindergarten program is availed by over 300 kindergarten students enrolled on our Saipan, Tinian and Rota public schools. The Public School System could enroll more students if additional funding is available. The kindergarten enrollment can reach up to at least 700 students or more similar to the number of students that are enrolled in Grade One.

However, for more than two decades now, PSS continuously defrayed the cost associated in providing kindergarten program. As studies have shown, like in Queens University, parents noticed the growth in their child's social skills, vocabulary, and capacity to work through problems and self-regulate to a greater degree than they had prior to full day Kindergarten entry.

Hence, with the PSS support in favor of the intent of House Legislative Initiative 18-12 will mean additional funding for a full-day Kindergarten classes as mandated by the State Board of Education.

B. Classroom Instruction and Technology

The recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards provide clear, consistent and rigorous learning goals to help prepare students for college and career. Improving

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classroom instruction has become central to PSS in building the overall capacity of its teachers and students.

At the onset of the 21st century, technology has changed classroom instruction dramatically. This is true for PSS, at how we have adapted to change to best serve our students. We have stepped-up and implemented research-based instructional strategies and best practices to improve classroom learning and student outcomes.

With the use of technology in teaching and learning, we will continue to facilitate learning outcomes, develop capacity for learning and leading instructional improvement, and create support system for educator's collaborative learning. Paramount to this is the role of role of technology and how it will aid classroom instruction.

With HLI 18-12, PSS is be able to sustain its research-based and data-driven Content Standard that, among others, expects that our public school students will continually develop and acquire appropriate technology skills, demonstrate use of technology application and tools, and must have the ability to meet the demand of a technology-based economic/workforce landscape.

This will also meet our goal to produce high school graduates who are college and career ready, with the 21st Century Learning Skills.

Essentially, this is about equal access to quality services and programs for our public school students. With HLI 18-12, our public school students will continue to avail of resources, materials, expertise and other forms of support.

C. Class Size Reduction

In supporting the transformative influence of public education, there is a need for adequate funding to be invested and assist the Public School System in reducing the number of students per classroom. Research has shown the effect on student achievement and smaller classes to have a significant impact on student achievement and narrowing of the achievement gap. The impact of small class size is an important determinant of a variety of student outcomes, ranging from test scores to broader life outcomes (Schanzenbach, 2014)

With the continuous dip in funding and resources for public education throughout the past ten (10) years, overcrowding in classrooms has become significantly prevalent.

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Teacher-student ratio has ballooned, with some classrooms having 36:1 student-teacher ratio— an all-time high number and much higher than the Board of Education policy on 25:1 student-teacher ratio.

With the enactment of HLII 18-12, PSS will have the ability to provide for a conducive learning environment of a smaller class size by hiring additional teachers, essentially reducing overcrowding in classrooms.

D. Continuous School Improvement and Modernization of School Facilities

As a member of AdvancED, the accrediting parent of North Central Association – Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement, the PSS received high marks in three (3) of its quality standards and must work toward improving two (2) school district quality standards. These two district quality standards are 1) Resources and Support System and 2) Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The North Central Association – Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement indicated that the public school system must do something to improve the resources and provide for services in all schools that support its purpose and direction, to ensure success for all students. These resources ranged from maintaining facilities, services and equipment to provide for a safe, clean and healthy environment for all students and staff, having highly qualified professional staff to support staff, to support the purpose and direction of the school district, individual schools and educational programs for all students, instructional materials resources and fiscal resources are sufficient, provides technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning and operational needs, provides a support system to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of all students served, and provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational and planning needs of all students.

Similarly, over the years and due to budget constraints, the PSS has absorbed an estimated of \$11.3 million dollars' worth of deferred maintenance. This was according to the Office of Insular Affairs' 2012 assessment which was released in December, 2013.

This deferred maintenance is a postponement measure for PSS facilities' repairs and renovations that were put on hold, repairs that are neglected and preventative maintenance that continually been ignored due to lack of funding. Further delay of the plan adds up to a costly and complex problem of maintaining the structural integrity of our school facilities.

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The school district has a total of 19 school campuses that have school buildings built between the late 1940s and the most recent in 2002. The list indicates that our school buildings ranged from 12 to 68 years old.

Table 1.4 Schools and Dates of Construction

School	Date of Establishment/Construction
William S. Reyes Elementary School	1946
Hopwood Jr. High School	1949
Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary	1951
Tinian Elementary	1954
Oleai Elementary	1958
Garapan Elementary	1967
Tanapag Elementary	1968
San Antonio Elementary	1968
Marianas High School	1969
San Vicente Elementary	1971
Koblerville Elementary	1986
Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Jr. Sr. High School	1982
Tinian Jr. Sr. High School	1986
Dandan Elementary	1999
Kagman Elementary	2000
Sinapalo Elementary	2001
Chacha Oceanview Middle School	2002
Saipan Southern High	2002
Kagman High	2002

PSS continues to search for new and improved ways of meeting the needs of students and classroom learning. This approach is “about sustaining our work” through continuous improvement.

Foremost to this is how we will sustain our success and growth despite our challenges. These challenges have not hampered PSS in meeting both the mandate of the State Board

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and its Strategic Priorities PLUS in pursuing its transformative work, pushing the barrier of classroom learning for our public school students to be able to compete globally.

HLL 18-12 will ensure that the school district will continue to conduct professional development for the continued learning and growth of its staff and personnel, including parents, improvement and repairs of its classrooms, buildings and facilities, among others.

We once again appreciate the request for comments and we ask that you continue to extend PSS the opportunity to participate on issues affected public education.

If you have any questions regarding our school district's position to this initiative, please do not hesitate to contact us

Sincerely,



Lucia L. Blanco-Maratita, Esq.
Chairperson
Legislative & Intergovernmental
Affairs Committee



Rita A. Sablan, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Education

cc: Members, State Board of Education

1 **Section 1: Elementary and Secondary Education.**

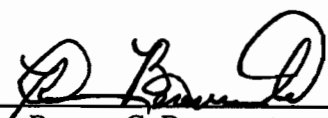
2 e) The public elementary and secondary education system shall be
3 guaranteed an annual budget of not less than ~~fifteen~~ twenty-five
4 percent of the general revenues of the Commonwealth. The
5 budgetary appropriation may not be reprogrammed for other
6 purposes, and any unencumbered fund balance at the end of a
7 fiscal year shall be available for reappropriation.”

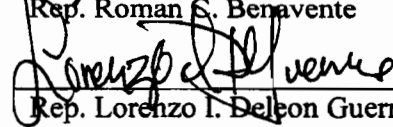
8 **Section 3. Adoption and Transmittal.**

9 The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate shall certify, and
10 the Clerks of the House and Senate shall attest to the adoption of this Legislative
11 Initiative. The House Clerk shall then cause the Initiative to be transmitted to the
12 Governor and the Board of Elections. Pursuant to Article XVIII, Section 5 of the
13 Commonwealth Constitution, the Board shall place this Legislative Initiative, with
14 the Findings and Purpose section herein, before the people of the Commonwealth
15 for ratification vote at the earlier of the next regular general election or the next
16 special election established by law.

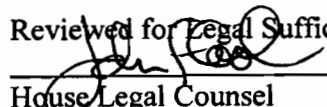
Prefiled: 11/13/13

Date: 11/13/13 Introduced By:



Rep. Roman S. Benavente


Rep. Lorenzo I. Deleon Guerrero

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency by:


House Legal Counsel