



PARSS Legislative Update ***June 26, 2023***

School Vouchers Added to the State Budget Discussions

With June 30 a mere five days away, it appears unlikely that we will see an on time state budget. While the House did pass a budget featuring Democratic priorities by a single vote on June 5, and the Senate moved the bill (House Bill 611) to the Senate floor last week, it did so after reversing the House-passed increases by reverting to current year spending—essentially sending the budget back to square one.

After the House approved House Bill 611, House Republican Leader Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster) called it a “bloated spending plan that reflects their unilateral priorities.” Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman said the spending in the Democratic budget was “an impossible number.”

In typical fashion, the budget process has played out publicly in both chambers and behind closed doors as well. Last week, House Republicans used their muscle to prevent passage of the so-called non-preferred appropriations for Penn State, Temple, Lincoln, and Pitt which require a 2/3rds vote. The lower chamber caucuses have also sparred over an increase in the minimum wage and tax credits for new entrants to police forces, fire departments, and teaching positions.

While some of the partisan banter is usual and customary during June budget season, there are several indications that we could be in for a protracted budget fight. There are many new players in the budget discussions this year (a new governor, a new House majority, a new Senate Republican leadership team), a delay in the budget proposal when a new Governor comes to Harrisburg, and the exploding fight over school vouchers could make fashioning a state spending plan more complicated than usual. Plus, when state coffers have available resources, more causes find champions to advocate for additional or new funding.

The school voucher fight has broken out in the Legislature before, but never with a Democratic Governor lending support or at least qualified support. According to Spotlight PA, new PDE Secretary Khalid Mumin said in recent correspondence to the Senate Education Committee that the Governor “favors adding choices for parents and education opportunity for students and

funding lifeline scholarships as long as those choices do not impact school district funding.” PARSS has joined with the other major education groups in opposing voucher funding. You can read more about the voucher issue by [clicking here](#). Here is one [lifeline scholarship proposal](#) introduced in the Senate.

The House did pass the state income tax credit of up to \$2,500 for new police officers, firefighters, and teachers by a margin of 137-66. About one third of the House Republicans joined all House Democrats in supporting the bill, [House Bill 1249](#). To see how your Representative voted [go here](#). To read an analysis of the legislation you can [click here](#). New hires as of January of this year who meet the other criteria in the legislation would be eligible for the income tax credit.

The House also sent [House Bill 1331](#) to the Senate by a vote of 141-62. The bill creates a state funded stipend for student teaching. The legislation creates the Educator Pipeline Support Grant Program with a \$10,000 base stipend and an additional \$5,000 stipend where there are “high vacancy” rates. The legislation is effective immediately. You can read an [analysis of the legislation here](#). Thirty-nine Republicans joined all Democrats in voting for the bill. Click here for the [voting breakdown](#).

The budget negotiations will be dynamic and fluid this week. More updates will be coming as developments occur.