



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In Support of S.223, An Act modernizing the Foundation Budget for the 21st century
By Mary E. Franz, LWVMA Education Committee
July 25, 2017

For nearly 50 years, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) has monitored both general municipal aid and education aid. And since the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993, the League has been a critic of the Chapter 70 formula for distributing education aid and has proposed solutions to provide a more equitable formula.

Despite our concerns, the League has strongly supported the basic premise of the education reform act that, as the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled, the Commonwealth must provide an adequate education for all of those enrolled in its public schools. The act defined the cost of an adequate education by the Foundation Budget, a calculation which is itself defined by a second formula in Chapter 70. The two formulas work together so that, each year, the state's aid to local schools is based upon the individual school district's Foundation Budget as calculated for that year.

The 2015 Foundation Budget Review Commission found that actual costs, particularly those associated with health care and special education, have far surpassed assumptions built into the original Foundation Budget formula. As a result, those increasing costs have forced districts to cut other critical investments, including professional development, counseling, arts, technology and books, early education, social-emotional supports, and extended days and a longer school year.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports S.223, sponsored by Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz. This bill renews the promise that every student in Massachusetts will have equal access to adequate quality education by significantly revising the Foundation Budget formula. It will adjust the formula to more accurately project districts' costs, to more equitably distribute resources, and to empower schools to improve outcomes for all students.

The bill sets a multi-year phasing in of the recommendations contained in the bipartisan Foundation Budget Review Commission's 2015 report. Until all the recommendations are implemented, the Foundation Budget will continue to fall short of accurately representing the full cost of an adequate education. Passing S.223 will, however, represent the legislature's commitment to making these necessary changes.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges the members of the Joint Committee on Education to give S.223 a favorable report and urge its enactment.

Thank you for your consideration.