

IN SUPPORT OF S291

“... to fulfill the promise of education reform: adequate funding for student success.”

Testimony presented to the Joint Committee on Education on September 12, 2007

By Mary Frantz, Education Finance Specialist (mary.franz@comcast.net)

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

In its decision in the case *Hancock v. The Commissioner of Education et al.*, the Supreme Judicial Court reaffirmed the 1993 *McDuffy v. Secretary of Education* decision that the state has the responsibility to ensure that every child in Massachusetts receives an adequate education. The Legislature recognized this responsibility in the Education Reform Act of 1993, stating very clearly that “It is the intention of the general court, subject to appropriation, to assure fair and adequate minimum per student funding for public schools in the commonwealth by defining a foundation budget ...” (Chapter 70: Section 1).

The 1993 Education Reform Act called for the foundation budget to be reviewed every three years by a Foundation Budget Review Commission. But in fact there have been only two reviews and little change since 1993. As evidence presented in the *Hancock* trial demonstrated, many children in the Commonwealth are not receiving an adequate education, and the lack of adequate resources plays a major role.

The League of Women Voters believes that it is essential that there be an independent review to determine whether the Foundation Budget represents sufficient funding to enable school districts to meet the state’s educational standards. This review should also include an evaluation of the Department of Education to determine whether it has the necessary resources to help school districts assure success for all public school students.

Many factors have increased the cost of providing an adequate education since 1993; the development of the seven curriculum frameworks, increased requirements in professional development, advances in technology, research demonstrating the importance of low class size and early childhood education are just some of these. In addition, although the foundation budget is adjusted yearly for inflation, inflationary costs in some of its components, such as energy and employee benefits, have far exceeded the annual adjustment.

In FY2000 the Legislature achieved the goal of assuring that every school district had the financial resources equal to its foundation budget through required local school spending and state aid. Since then it has been faithful to this commitment. However, if the foundation budget is not sufficient to provide for the constitutionally required adequate education, the Commonwealth is falling short in its duty to our children in the public schools.

The League of Women Voters urges you to vote YES on S291.