

House Democrat Policy Committee  
April 4, 2013  
Scranton, PA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for inviting me to address the Democratic Policy Committee today. My name is Rosemary Boland. I am the president of the Scranton Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1147. Chartered in 1952, SFT represents educational professionals and paraprofessionals who work in the Scranton School District. I am also the Executive Vice-President of AFT-Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania's state Federation of Teachers, which represents thousands of school district certified and support employees, community college faculty, college faculty, and state employees throughout the Commonwealth.

Today's committee meeting has been scheduled to discuss state education funding and school safety, and I submit that the two are closely linked. Policy makers cannot discuss improved school safety without also considering adequate school funding.

Let's start with school safety. The tragedy in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, has raised the nation's consciousness regarding school safety. However, school safety is about so much more than guns and mass shootings on school property.

*Webster's* dictionary defines *safety* as "the condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury or loss." There are many ways that hurt, injury and loss can happen on school property, and national, state and local policies protecting students and employees are essential for ensuring that schools are safe.

However, one thing that will not improve school safety is assigning armed guards to schools or training school staff on the use of firearms. At a time when state funding for public education has been cut so severely, school districts have increased class size, cut school counseling services, and slashed school health services because of decreasing funding from the state. Adequate school counseling, health services and manageable class sizes are essential to ensuring school safety. Providing these should be the debate in Harrisburg, not arming teachers.

Furthermore, placing more guns on school campuses will not solve the problems raised by the presence of guns on school campuses. Our national organization, the American Federation of Teachers, has published the following data regarding this:

State Rep. Kevin Haggerty, D-Lackawanna, requested the hearing and served as co-chairman. The hearing looked at the impact of education funding cuts to local schools as well as school safety issues.

- The FBI and other law enforcement agencies have increased the training requirements and resources—including specialized virtual reality devices—for their agents in order to deal with close-quarters shooting arrangements.
- Given the high degree of training needed for police officers to appropriately engage against armed assailants in close quarters, the International Association of Chiefs of Police has recommended against arming staff or volunteers to protect schools, calling it a “distraction.”
- Of shootings in emergency rooms in American hospitals, 23 percent are done with a weapon taken from an armed guard. The presence of armed guards who are not properly trained law enforcement officers may add to the danger at a school.
- There are cases of successful civilian intervention in mass shootings that involve former police officers and military personnel. However, research into every mass shooting incident over the past 30 years found not one documented case of an otherwise licensed civilian successfully intervening during a shooting.
- A nationwide poll by Widmeyer Communications found that 61 percent of the public believe arming teachers is a bad idea.

Now let’s turn to education funding. For the third year in a row, the Corbett administration has put providing a quality education for all students of Pennsylvania last on his agenda. From pension changes to privatization of Wine and Spirits Shops to budget freezes, the Governor’s proposals would be terrible for Pennsylvania’s working families and students.

- The deep cuts to community colleges and universities from 2011-12 have yet to be addressed.
- The \$90 million increase in basic education funding is a step in the right direction, but does not come close to filling the \$1 billion cut in K-12 education from 2011-12.
- The pension benefit reductions and changes proposed by the Governor are politically motivated. The simple fact that his proposal further depressed employer contribution rates in the short term proves that the solvency of the pension system is not a priority.

- It is unacceptable that a four-year increase in one-time funding to local school districts is tied to selling off a state asset which generates \$500 million annually to fund state services. What will happen after four years? What taxes will have to be raised to replace the \$500 million in annual revenue, which do help fund schools, colleges, and universities?

Where is the lengthy debate on these issues? Where is the conversation in Harrisburg which highlights how, at the same that the Pennsylvania Department of Education is requiring higher and more rigorous standards for graduation, that same Department of Education is not requesting adequate funding for programs which are sustainable and increase student achievement? Where is the conversation in Harrisburg which highlights how, at the same time that the General Assembly enacted a new evaluation system for teachers, that the same General Assembly has yet to ensure teachers that they will receive the resources necessary to meet those new standards established by the evaluation system?

I along with my other AFT locals throughout the Commonwealth have a few core beliefs which we hope will inform this cycle's budget debate:

- Gov. Corbett's 2013-14 education spending proposal is inadequate. It increases the likelihood of continued declines in student achievement, perpetuates growing disparities in funding and opportunity and continues shifting responsibility for funding education to local taxpayers. Rather than accelerating achievement by making students a top priority, the governor's budget shortchanges schools and uses rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul gimmicks and speculative funding that might never materialize. Gov. Corbett's budget expands tax cuts for businesses at the expense of children and middle-class families who rely on good schools and affordable college tuition to get ahead. We urge Legislators to reject new business tax breaks and postpone scheduled tax cuts to provide PA residents with educational opportunities that will promote economic growth and stability.
- In the face of sustained funding cuts to education programs and other vital public services, Pennsylvania cannot afford to "leave money on the table" in the form of expensive corporate tax credits and tax cuts. We oppose tax breaks for corporations that threaten needed programs and shift public costs to individuals and to local taxpayers.
- We support the defined-benefit pensions provided through Pennsylvania School Employees Retirement System and State Employees Retirement System for current retirees, current school

and state employees and future employees. Defined-benefit pension plans are the most cost-effective way to provide retirees with stable, secure retirement income and keep them off public assistance.

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Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for inviting me to testify at today's committee meeting. I am happy to answer any questions you may have