
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Education Committee

Respectfully Submitted by: Jill Briggs Campbell, Ph.D., AOE Director of Operations
Bob Donohue, AOE School Facilities Program Manager

Subject: **Agency of Education Feedback on H.871**

Date: April 11, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.871, an act relating to school construction. While this is important preliminary work, a sustainable funding source to support this program has not yet been identified. The Agency cautions that there is not a current solution to school construction funding in sight despite the important first steps you see in the bill. We do not want to over-promise to the field.

The AOE supports the current draft of H.871. It is a natural extension of the recommendations made by the [Construction Aid Taskforce](#) and is a result of a collaborative and thoughtful process between the House Education Committee, the Agency of Education with input from partners that included industry experts and the school associations.

Critically, the bill, as drafted, strikes a balance between outlining specific tasks or mandated actions and providing enough flexibility for both the master planning grant program and the working group to respond flexibly as new issues or ideas arise.

In addition, the AOE agrees that the working group should be a Legislative committee with the ability to direct the work of the Joint Fiscal Office and access to the expertise of legislative counsel, while also including the AOE in its membership. The directives of the working group are in alignment with the work of the construction taskforce and cover all of the essential elements that need consideration in the build out of a future state school construction aid program.



AOE strongly supports the current bill's tasks assigned and makeup of the working group. We would caution against substantial changes to this group (i.e., by adding more members, or developing lists of more topics, or more groups that are required to be consulted). While not every potential stakeholder or interested party is listed for specific consultation, it is our opinion that the very specific range of topics and issues that must be considered necessitate a deep engagement with a wide range of experts and partners, including those that work within the school community.

Similarly, the master planning grant, by design, is specific in its legislative intent, while allowing AOE discretion to carry out a streamlined granting process that will align to the decision making of the Working Group. We do not recommend adding additional criteria that would prevent the necessary flexibility to meet future state decisions and needs. The end result of a district level master planning process should support and inform larger conversations around state construction aid, while also preparing SU/SDs to make thoughtful investments in school infrastructure.