House Finance Division II Work Group on HB 623, relative to education fundingThursday November 4th – Second Meeting

On Thursday, November 4th, the Division II Work Group held their second meeting at which Phil Sletten, Senior Policy Analyst, of the NH Fiscal Policy Institute provided a presentation on Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility (see attached handout)

Work Group Members:

From House Finance:  
• Rep. Karen Umberger, House Finance Chair, Kearsarge  
• Rep. Joseph Pitre, Farmington (Absent)  
• Rep. Bob Lynn, Windham (former Supreme Court Judge) ((Absent))  
• Rep. Tom Buco, Conway  
• Rep. Mary Heath, Manchester  
From House Education:  
• Rep. Rick Ladd, House Education Chair, Haverhill  
• Rep. Glenn Cordelli, Tuftonboro  
• Rep. David Luneau, Concord  
• Rep. Art Ellison, Concord

Meeting Notes

Phil Sletten provided a brief overview of the research regarding the Free and Reduced (F & R) Meal eligibility and the partnership with the Community Development Finance Authority regarding community progress.

Mr. Sletten’s charge was to explain the current metrics for eligibility and suggest other metrics for data collection.

The following are highlights regarding the research:

* Page 1 explains eligibility for the F & R program and addresses a key question of potential changes to the implementation of the F & R program.
* Page 2 provides numbers for selected potential metrics such as the Food Stamp Program and Medicaid enrollment which includes other categories such as newborns and not just grades 1-12.
* Page 3 provides other possible types of data collection to better determine eligibility for the F & R program.
* Pages 4-5 provide other possible metrics for measuring local poverty.
* The last few pages provide graphs that illustrates the various relationships between the F & R program, ADMA, equalized taxable property.

Mr. Sletten did not advocate for any one metric but only provided different options.

Caitlin Davis, Department of Education, spoke to the DOE process in data collection and stated that the DOE does not collect data from parents, nor do they have F & R applications. Such data is received from the school districts.

The DOE collect enrollment data at the beginning of a school year (October 1st) which includes the F & R program. This data is used to determine education funding.

Ms. Davis stated that DOE has issued an RFP for a vendor to obtain “real-time” data.

Chairwoman Umberger reported on her outreach to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In particular, the Children’s Health and Insurance Program (CHIP). The thought is that CHIP may be another metric to better determine the F & R program. Yet, DHHS cannot provide data of any community with less than five (5) children.

Further, the eligibility is 196% of the federal poverty guidelines which will add more students to the F & R program. Mr. Sletten reminded the committee that CHIP is part of NH Medicaid where other states it is not.

Two members of Reaching Higher NH (Nicole Heimarck, Ex. Director and Christina Pretorius) also provided information (see attached) as to what other states do to determine F & R meal programs. Examples of such allocations can be found on page 3.

Further, Ms. Heimarck stated that 450 out of 500 school districts (public and charter schools) applied for a waiver to provide 100% of F & R meals. The data is of October 29, 2021, and from the DOE

In conclusion, Chairwoman Umberger will have more discussions with DHHS and to look at other options to better prepare for the next budget cycle in 2023. Her goal is to address school funding in 2024.

The next meeting of the committee is Thursday, December 2nd at 1:00 pm.