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Up the Street: MSEA Legislative Updates

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THE WEEK THAT WAS IN ANNAPOLIS

- **General Assembly Gives Final Approval to FY2017 Budget**

Following the passage of slightly different budgets in the House and Senate, a team of senators and delegates—known as the conference committee—worked out a compromise budget plan that **passed both the Senate and House chambers earlier this week**. The final **FY2017 budget** includes full mandatory funding for Maryland public schools, as well as \$19 million to help local governments meet the cost of educator pensions. It also includes supplemental funding for districts with declining enrollment.

However, the conference committee also included \$5 million for a private school voucher program to be administered by the Maryland State Department of Education. While we have been able to stop several bills from creating larger and permanent voucher programs, Gov. Hogan used his budgetary authority to push through the program in budget language. Fortunately, the program only has funding for one year. That means we can work to stop its continuation in the next legislative session. **You can read more about Hogan Vouchers here.**

- **U.S. Supreme Court Rejects *Friedrichs*, Affirms Fair Share**

Labor unions across the country breathed a deep sigh of relief on Tuesday when the **Supreme Court deadlocked in a 4-4 split decision in *Friedrichs vs. California Teachers Association***, deferring to the lower court's decision to affirm the constitutionality of fair share fees. **NEA released a statement** saying the Supreme Court "rejected a political ploy to silence public employees like teachers, school bus drivers, cafeteria workers, higher education faculty and other educators to work together to shape their profession."

In cases where the Court has split decisions, there is no precedent set—allowing similar cases to be heard down the road. The Center for Individual Rights (the far-right organization that brought *Friedrichs*) was quick to suggest they would try again to strip away fair share, saying, "A full court needs to decide this question, and we expect this case will be reheard when a new justice is confirmed." It is likely that the issue of fair share fees will be decided by the next Supreme Court justice, and unless Republican Senators decide to do their job and consider President Obama's nominee, the balance of the court will be decided by the 2016 presidential election.

- **House Economic Matters Committee Passes Earned Sick Leave**

For the first time since being introduced in 2013, the **House Economic Matters Committee advanced legislation on Wednesday to guarantee all workers seven days of earned sick leave per year**. The bill remained largely intact with just a couple of amendments that exempted small businesses of 15 or fewer employees and workers under the age of 18. The bill has enough cosponsors to pass both the full House and Senate chambers, so advancing through committee is an important step. It is expected to pass the full House in the coming days and then move over to the Senate.

Earned sick leave is one of our coalition-based legislative priorities for the 2016 session. During the bill's hearing, MSEA submitted testimony arguing that "providing sick and safe leave to employees helps build stronger families, healthier communities, businesses with healthier, happier, and more productive employees, and students that are ready to learn." If the bill passes, Maryland would join California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Vermont in providing this basic protection for working families.

- **News and Notes**

- *No More School Construction Beg-a-thon?*

Each year, after state school construction money is directed to local districts across Maryland, a portion is kept aside for a later round of disbursement. Districts come before the Board of Public Works for what is called the "Beg-a-thon," where school officials make the case for construction projects in their county. Recently, superintendents argued that Gov. Hogan and Comptroller Franchot have been using the occasion to promote political causes—an act the superintendents called "grandstanding." As a result, **a group of legislators have added an amendment to the capital budget that would eliminate the "Beg-a-thon,"** making recommendations by the Interagency Committee on School Construction final.

- *Michelle Rhee's StudentsFirst Organization Folds*

Just five years after its founding, **StudentsFirst—Michelle Rhee's corporate education reform group—announced it would be absorbed by 50Can,** another national education reform organization. The groups explained the move as a way to focus more on education policy at the state level as the Every Student Succeeds Act gets implemented. However, StudentsFirst had a well-documented difficulty in fundraising and now becomes just the latest evidence that attacking educator unions has little mainstream appeal.

- *MSEA Testifies Against Tax Cuts for the Top 1%*

SB 840—the Senate bill that would cut tax rates for the top income earners in Maryland—received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee this week. MSEA staff testified at the hearing, telling legislators: "MSEA agrees that education must be diligently protected and is determined to oppose any proposals that adversely impact the revenue generating capacity of state and local governments and harm their ability to provide adequate resources for our public schools." We continue to work with coalition partners to oppose these misguided tax cuts for the rich.

- **Hillary Releases Strong Statement Backing *Friedrichs* Decision**

Yesterday, **Hillary Clinton released a statement** backing the *Friedrichs* outcome, saying, “Yesterday’s Supreme Court decision was a win for American workers and their families, protecting collective bargaining rights and keeping public sector unions from being undermined...the right to organize is one of our most fundamental rights as Americans.” **She reiterated this point on the campaign trail** in Wisconsin, where she told supporters, “You look at when we built the American middle class, it came out of the American labor movement. Unions provided the ability to bargain with powerful economic interests.” Sign up to become an Educator for Hillary at **www.strongpublicschools.org**. The Maryland primary is on April 26.

- **MSEA Re-Launches Apple Ballot for 2016 Election**

MSEA re-launched our well-known Apple Ballot website to promote educator-recommended candidates in the 2016 primary election. Just go to **mdappleballot.com**, enter your name, email, and county, and the website will tell you who has been recommended for different elected offices. You can also learn about **MSEA’s endorsement process** there and donate to **MSEA’s Political Action Fund**.

- **Gov. Hogan Announces He’s “Just Kidding” about Spending \$5 Million on Private School Vouchers, Will Expand Public Pre-K Instead**

If only...sadly, in today’s Maryland this only serves as an April Fool’s Day joke!

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