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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

June 21, 2000

Original: 2039

John R. McGinley, Chairman
Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Mr. McGinley:

The House Education Committee met on Wednesday, June 14, 2000, to consider final-form rulemaking #6-264 (22 PA Code, Chapter 354) submitted by the Department of Education. In accordance with the provisions of 5.1(d) of the Regulatory Review Act (Act 181 of 1982), the Committee, by a majority vote, disapproved the Department's rulemaking for the following reason(s):

1. Grade-point average for admission to program. The Committee believes that the requirement of a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (G.P.A.) for admission to a program (Section 354.31(4)) removes too much responsibility from the preparing institution to set high standards for applicants. Several members commented that the institutions are in a better position to evaluate the qualities of various applicants for admission. Another factor to be considered in establishing any G.P.A. requirement is the inconsistency of grading between institutions. Institutional standards of grading vary and a requirement of high G.P.A. could be the impetus for inflating grades - an unanticipated consequence of good intent.

Given the potential for future shortages of teachers, especially in the areas of math, science, foreign language, and special education, and the stage of a student's career at which this standard is imposed (mid-way in the sophomore year), the Committee considers the waivers to G.P.A. as an admissions requirement to be inadequate and takes the position that the best method is to let institutions sink or swim with their own admissions policy. In support of this position, the Committee notes that two provisions in the Department's submission already conditionally permit this institutional standard to occur (i.e. the 10% waiver of admission requirements given to institutions in §354.31(7) and the waiver for 90% passage on the assessments in §354.31(8)).

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Furthermore, the Committee questioned whether high grade point average correlated with better teaching. Although there may be statistical evidence supporting this correlation, the Committee believes that problems relating to poor teaching in a district might also arise from the hiring practices of the specific district (e.g. nepotism), rather than from poor teacher-preparation programs.

2. Weakening the Standards. The Committee feels that the language of §354.24(3) regarding the inclusion of elective credits toward the preparation program, is weak, especially in light of the 3.0 G.P.A. exit requirement. Members understand that the intent is to balance the need for a rigorous standard with institutional flexibility in determining that standard. However, the effect, we believe, will result in a “dumbing-down” of standards, as students choose relatively easy courses to bolster their G.P.A. Language of this subsection needs to be more precise in its wording and err, if necessary, in favor of more rigor.

We have included additional comments from a Committee member, Representative Curry, as an attachment to this letter.

Despite the Committee’s disapproval, we commend the Department for its diligent efforts and numerous improvements between the proposed and final-form rulemaking. Flexibility in its exit requirements, added definitions, the inclusion of learning principles for various types of certification, the numerous cross-references to other laws, and the revised structure of the document are dramatic improvements. We appreciate the time and effort the Department staff and State Board invested in the development of this current document.

We hope that any revision to the final-form rulemaking considers our comments. If the Commission or Department need clarification on this action, please contact my office.

Sincerely,



Representative Jess M. Stairs
Chairman, House Education Committee

JMS/er

Attachment: (1) Curry letter

cc: Eugene Hickok, Secretary, Department of Education
Dr. James Gallagher, Chairman, State Board of Education
Members of House Education Committee