



**The Office of State Representative Jeffrey Sánchez
Chairman, Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing**

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Representative Alice Peisch
Chairwoman, Joint Committee on Education
State House Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Peisch,

I am writing in regards to House Bill 498, *An Act relative to language opportunity for our kids*. I filed this bill to create more inclusive educational opportunities for English Language Learners in Massachusetts schools. This is an issue that affects a large number of residents, with nearly a quarter of the children in Massachusetts identifying as either immigrants or the children of immigrants. The populations of ELL students are more significant in certain communities across the Commonwealth. For instance, in the Boston Public School system 23,000 out of 59,000 students have native languages other than English.

This legislation proposes to amend Massachusetts Public Schools policy of transferring their students into English only classrooms after an average of one year. This is simply not enough time to prepare students for English-only classes. In 2011, ELL students were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) for an average of 3.5 years. This policy of moving ELL students into English only classrooms too early, hurts their growth and perpetuates the growing gap in dropout rates. Drop-out rates for all students in state are 5.6%, while ELL students are nearly three times that percentage. At 14.9% in 2014, the ELL students marked the highest dropout rate of all student groups.

On top of the high dropout rate, the graduation rates for ELL students across Massachusetts are also significantly lower. The general population graduates at the rate of 86.1% compared to 63.9% for students whose first language is not English. These statistics show the educational gap that has formed in our school system and without state intervention, this growing divide will continue.

My legislation will go even further than just expanding classroom options for ELL students by also tracking the students' progress throughout their academic career. Currently, there is no follow up for ELL students after they transition out of sheltered English immersion. This lack of accountability has contributed to their educational disparities.

In 2011, the Department of Justice ruled that the Commonwealth failed to take sufficient action to overcome the language barriers experienced by ELL students. Despite the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's implementation of the RETELL Initiative, the statistics

show that we are still failing our most vulnerable students. The RETELL Initiative updated training and licensing requirements for educators who teach SEI classrooms. My legislation would work with RETELL by allowing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to promulgate the pathway for teachers to be certified supplementary to the work the RETELL started.

House Bill 498 will provide the framework for school districts to better serve the needs of ELL students, while offering greater flexibility for educators. With this legislation, school districts with ELL students must provide a report to parents and educators including descriptions of programs in all student languages, descriptions of student assessments and testing, an explanation of the opportunities the district is making available to LEP students, as well as an ELL program evaluation of the school district.

Lastly, this bill will establish the State Seal of Biliteracy to stress the importance of being bilingual in Massachusetts. With this legislation, we look to commend our students for being a global asset to us here in the Commonwealth. It is through this legislation that we also hope to encourage English students to learn a language and incentivize them to acquire these beneficial language skills.

I respectfully request that this bill be favorably reported out of committee. Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Sánchez
State Representative, 15th Suffolk District