

## Jeanna Gettys

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**From:** James Roebuck  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 18, 2014 11:35 AM  
**To:** Jeanna Gettys  
**Subject:** Representative Roebuck's Testimony to House Appropriations Committee on the Governor's 2014-15 Proposed Budget

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**Education Committee**  
**Representative James R. Roebuck, Jr.**  
**Democratic Chairman**  
Christopher Wakeley, *Executive Director*

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### **Testimony on the Governor's 2014-15 Proposed Budget**

I want to thank the House Appropriations Committee for providing me with the opportunity to present written testimony concerning the Governor's proposed budget for 2014-15. I ask that my testimony be included in the record of presentations made to the Appropriations Committee.

As Democratic Chairman of the House Education Committee, I wanted to address several concerns I have about the Corbett Administration's budget proposal regarding funding for basic and higher education for our citizens and children.

While the Governor's proposal does provide \$240 million for a New Ready to Learn Block grant I am disappointed that the Governor's proposal provides no increase in the basic education line item that provides for the maintenance of our public school system and does not fully address the nearly \$1 billion cut in basic education funding over the last two years. And like last year the funding increase in this new block grant funding is tainted because wealthier school districts will get larger percentage increases than lower-income districts.

I am particularly concerned in this budget about the Corbett Administration continuing attempts to move toward only providing increases in basic education for specific state desired activities by school districts. The Ready to Learn Block grant is another attempt by the Corbett Administration to tie any increase in basic education funding to specific activities by school districts. This approach to funding basic education is different from all previous administrations that have provided increases in basic education funding AND then offered funding for specific educational initiatives. This new approach by the Corbett Administration not only denies local school district control over how to best allocate state funding but also places the entire burden of maintaining existing education services on the backs of local taxpayers. There needs to be some state funding increase for the basic education funding to provide for the maintenance of our public school system. Failure to provide any increase in basic education funding this budget year particular given the \$1 billion of state funding cuts since 2011 means the state is abdicating its responsibility to maintain a quality public education.

Increasing capital funding needs of basic and higher education are once again not addressed in the Governor's budget proposal. There is no increase in funding to reimburse school districts that have already started needed school construction projects. This is already resulting in school district having to pick up the

state share of payments on their school construction bonds and will likely lead to increased property tax increases.

It also appears that there will be a continuation for the third straight year of a destructive moratorium on new needed construction by school districts. This continuing construction moratorium will affect not only our school district construction needs but adversely affect our construction industry and construction related jobs as potential school construction projects are placed on hold due to the moratorium.

Additionally, there is no new funding for building maintenance needed by public higher education institutions and particularly for community college needs. How can we expect to meet the workforce needs of our business if we do not have the facilities needed particularly by community colleges to train the workers of our new economy.

Finally, like last year's budget, higher education was once again flat funded and no effort has been made to restore the 20% cuts in higher education funding since the beginning of the Corbett Administration. The Corbett Administration proposes no increase for any public higher education institution for 2014-15 even though the Governor's Advisory Commission on Postsecondary Education recommended in 2012 that the state provide for public higher education an initial performance fund of \$256 million to be earned over two years 2014-15 and 2015-16. Public higher education institutions signed off on these recommendations that included no increase in funding in 2013-14 in exchange for some funding increase in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Public higher education institutions have kept their tuition down under the expectation that the state would live up to the agreement in the Governor's Advisory Commission. Unfortunately, the Corbett Administration has not lived up to its part of the agreement. I hope that the General Assembly in its consideration of the 2014-25 budget will make good on this agreement with our high education institutions and commit to future increased investments in higher education for our citizens and students.

In closing, I want to once again thank the House Appropriations Committee for providing me with the opportunity to present written testimony concerning the Governor's proposed budget for 2014-15. I like to remind all members of the General Assembly and the public that unlike other areas of public policy we have a constitutional requirement to provide a thorough and efficient system of public education for the benefit of all our students and citizens of our Commonwealth. There can be no more important investments in our state's future than investing in our children's education. I am hopeful that we can improve on the inadequate funding of education in this year's Governor's budget and make greater investments in education in future years.