

Education Funding

Issue

As West Virginia’s leaders continue examination of the state’s tax system, thought should be given to possible restructuring and reforming the method in which public education is funded. This is essential since nearly two-thirds of the state’s General Revenue Fund goes to the education of our children to prepare them for the workforce of tomorrow.

Background

In 1999 the Governor’s Tax Fairness Commission prepared a report that contains an extensive review and analysis of the state’s system of funding and providing for a “thorough and efficient” education structure as mandated by our Constitution. It concluded that:

“ . . . (t)he funding of education is a convoluted history of constitutional provisions and amendments, statutes, lawsuits, money, attempts at quick fixes and all of the rhetoric that results from the debate of a hotly contested issue.

On the other hand, this history is also replete with legislators, governors, judges, interest groups and ordinary citizens whose motives were based upon their desire to provide each child in this State a good quality education.”

Without addressing all of the Commission’s findings and recommendations — let alone the many issues regarding the public education system — the Chamber recognizes that the issue of education funding has resulted in jostling between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government for over a quarter of a century. This has resulted in a blurring of jurisdiction and responsibility. The Chamber agrees with this recommendation of the Commission: That, at the very least, the line of authority over education funding should be constitutionally clarified by restating and reaffirming the Legislature’s existing constitutional authority in determining the proper level of education funding.

The Chamber’s Position

The West Virginia Chamber recommends, as stated by the Commission, “. . . a (c)onstitutional amendment be advanced that would institutionalize the Legislature as the sole party responsible for determining the level of spending on education.”