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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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STANDING COMMITTEES
DEFENSE & VETERANS AFFAIRS
INSURANCE
INTERSTATE COOPERATION
NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT
URBAN AFFAIRS

January 11, 2024

Subject: Request for a Hearing on Education Bills – House Bill 712, House Bill 899, and House Bill 900

Dear Chairman Chris Erwin,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am writing to formally request a hearing on three significant education bills currently under consideration in the House of Representatives Education Committee. As the Representative for House District 87, I believe that these bills, namely House Bill 712, House Bill 899, and House Bill 900, have the potential to greatly impact the education system in our state.

Allow me to provide a more detailed description of each bill to emphasize their significance:

1. House Bill 712: Ensuring Adequate Funding for School Transportation - House Bill 712 focuses on securing full funding for transportation in school districts across Georgia. This is a critical issue, as inadequate funding for transportation has been a recurring problem, particularly affecting rural districts. HB 712 would address this issue by increasing funding for transportation, ensuring that students can travel safely to and from school without imposing financial burdens on local districts. A fiscal note has been requested on HB 712 and is pending.
2. Refugee and International Students Equalization Fund (RISE) - The legislation, known as the "Refugee and International Students Equalization Fund (RISE)," would provide essential resources and support to refugees and international students in our public schools. This program would offer funding and wrap-around services to ensure students' success by addressing their unique needs, including education, translators, housing, medical care, counseling, nutrition, and transportation (See HB 900 – LC 49 1549). The fiscal note for HB 900 provides insight into the anticipated cost associated with its implementation. The fiscal note was requested.

Request for a Hearing on Education Bills – House Bill
712, House Bill 899, and House Bill 900

3. School Violence and Reduction and Safety Act: To bolster school safety and reduce incidents of violence in Georgia's public schools, we have drafted the "School Violence Reduction and Safety Act." This legislation would amend the QBE Act to allocate funds for enhancing security measures and creating a safer learning environment. The drafted legislation includes program weight adjustments, funding assistance, eligibility criteria, and maximum funding limits to ensure that schools can effectively reduce violence and improve safety (See HB 899 – LC 49 1555). This fiscal note for HB 899 indicates that the proposed measures will require an estimated \$103 million.

These bills are important to our constituents and warrant a thorough examination by the Education Committee. Therefore, I kindly request that you schedule hearings for House Bill 712, House Bill 899, and House Bill 900 at your earliest convenience. These hearings will provide an opportunity for lawmakers to gather insights, engage in meaningful discussions, and make informed decisions regarding this proposed legislation, taking into account the fiscal implications outlined in the respective fiscal notes.

I am confident that your leadership and expertise as the Chairman of the Education Committee will ensure a fair and productive hearing process. I am also committed to providing any necessary information or testimony to facilitate the hearings.

Please consider this letter as an official request for hearings on these education bills, accompanied by the relevant fiscal notes. Your prompt attention to this matter is greatly appreciated, and I look forward to your response.

Thank you for your dedication to improving education in our state, and I remain at your disposal for any further discussions or clarifications.

Sincerely,



Representative Viola Davis

Attachment



Georgia HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Guest Editorial

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Contact: Betsy Theroux
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Georgia Educational Priorities: Must Update the QBE Formula and Fully Fund Education

*By State Representatives Viola Davis (D-Stone Mountain), Sandra Scott (D-Rex) and Kim Schofield (D-Atlanta)
(557 words)*

Georgia's education system stands at a critical juncture. It is a moment where we can choose to prioritize the future of our children and our state's prosperity. Today, we are proud to present a legislative educational agenda that seeks to update the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula and ensure that education is fully funded – a long-overdue necessity.

For nearly two decades, the QBE formula has struggled to meet the needs of our students and schools. The last time it was revised was in the 1980s, and since then, our education system has been operating with limited resources and growing disparities. It is time to make substantial changes to provide our students with the education they deserve.

Our legislative agenda comprises four crucial pieces of legislation that will address these challenges head-on:

1. [House Bill 3: Support for Students Living in Poverty Act](#)

House Bill 3, authored by Rep. Scott, would provide additional resources to students living in poverty. This legislation recognizes that a student's financial status should never hinder their educational opportunities. By allocating an additional \$300 million for students living in poverty, we can launch programs that directly serve these students' needs, such as wrap-around learning interventions, mental health counseling and transportation for low-income students participating in dual enrollment programs.

2. [House Bill 712: Ensuring Adequate Funding for School Transportation](#)

House Bill 712, authored by Rep. Davis, focuses on securing full-funding for transportation in school districts across Georgia. This is a critical issue, as inadequate funding for transportation has been a recurring problem, particularly affecting rural districts. HB 712 would address this issue by increasing funding for transportation, ensuring that students can travel safely to and from school without imposing financial burdens on local districts.

3. Refugee and International Students Equalization Fund (RISE)

The legislation, "Refugee and International Students Equalization Fund (RISE)," would provide essential resources and support to refugees and international students in our public schools. This program would offer funding and wrap-around services to ensure students' success by addressing their unique needs, including education, translators, housing, medical care, counseling, nutrition and transportation (See LC 49 1549).

4. School Violence Reduction and Safety Act

To bolster school safety and reduce incidents of violence in Georgia's public schools, we have drafted the "School Violence Reduction and Safety Funds Act." This legislation would amend the QBE Act to allocate funds for enhancing security measures and creating a safer learning environment. The drafted legislation includes program weight adjustments, funding assistance, eligibility criteria and maximum funding limits to ensure that schools can effectively reduce violence and improve safety (See LC 49 1555).

Our legislative agenda is not just about updating formulas: it is about investing in the future of Georgia. These initiatives aim to provide students with equitable opportunities, ensure

safe and efficient transportation, support immigrant students and create a secure learning environment.

As these bills progress through the legislative process, we are committed to working tirelessly to ensure that Georgia's education system becomes a model for the nation, providing quality education for all our students. We believe in an inclusive and equitable future where every child can succeed, regardless of their zip codes, background or circumstances. Let us unite in support of these education priorities, updating the QBE formula and fully funding education so that we can build a brighter future for Georgia's children and our great state.

Editor's Note: A photo and drafted legislation for the Refugee and International Students Equalization Fund (RISE) and School Violence Reduction and Safety Act are attached.

Representative Viola Davis represents the citizens of District 87, which includes portions of DeKalb County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 and currently serves on the Defense & Veterans Affairs, Insurance, Interstate Cooperation, Natural Resources & Environment and Urban Affairs committees.

Representative Sandra Scott represents the citizens of District 76, which includes portions of Clayton County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2010 and currently serves as the Minority Caucus Chief Deputy Whip. She also serves on the Banks & Banking, Defense & Veterans Affairs, Human Relations & Aging, Insurance and Reapportionment and Redistricting committees.

Representative Kim Schofield represents the citizens of District 63, which includes portions of Fulton County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2017 and currently serves as the Secretary of the Urban Affairs Committee. She also serves on the Creative Arts & Entertainment, Health, Interstate Cooperation and Small Business Development committees.

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DOAA
Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

January 8, 2024

Honorable Viola Davis
State Representative
404-D Coverdell Legislative Office Bldg.
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

SUBJECT: Fiscal Note
House Bill (LC 49 1532)

Dear Representative Davis:

This bill would provide Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding assistance to eligible public schools to reduce school violence and improve school safety and security. Funding would begin with the 2025-2026 school year and shall not exceed one percent of the total QBE funding allotted to each school for the most recently completed school year. Funding also shall not exceed fifty percent of the actual costs incurred for implementing the school's safety plan, although this condition is subject to the hardship provisions in law (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1185).

The bill would result in additional school system funding of up to \$103.1 million based on available data. This amount represents the maximum of one percent of the base QBE earnings in FY 2024. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) does not have data on school system's safety plans and their associated costs, which could result in a lower cost to the state.

Depending on the policies and processes adopted to implement the bill, GaDOE may require a staff position to administer the program at an annual cost of \$140,500 (salary, benefits, and travel).

Respectfully,

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

Richard Dunn, Director
Office of Planning and Budget

GSG/RD/ahs

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Part 5 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia
2 Annotated, relating to program weights and funding requirements under the "Quality Basic
3 Education Act," so as to provide for QBE funding assistance to eligible public schools to
4 reduce school violence and improve school safety and security; to provide for eligibility; to
5 provide for the calculation and maximum amount of such funding; to provide for policies,
6 procedures, regulations, and requirements; to provide for a short title; to provide for related
7 matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal conflicting laws; and for
8 other purposes.

9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

10 **SECTION 1.**

11 This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "School Violence Reduction and Safety
12 Funds Act."

13 **SECTION 2.**

14 Part 5 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,
15 relating to program weights and funding requirements under the "Quality Basic Education
16 Act," is amended by revising Code Section 20-2-183, relating to program weights to reflect
17 funds for maintenance and operation of facilities, as follows:

18 "20-2-183.

19 (a) All program weights, when multiplied by the base amount, shall reflect sufficient funds
20 to provide for the maintenance and operation of facilities essential for housing instructional
21 programs and essential supportive educational services, subject to appropriation by the
22 General Assembly.

23 (b)(1) All program weights, when multiplied by the base amount, shall reflect sufficient
24 funds to provide funding assistance to reimburse eligible public schools for actual costs
25 incurred to reduce school violence and improve school safety and security. Such funds
26 may be referred to as school violence reduction and safety funds.

27 (2) The State Board of Education shall annually determine the amount of state funds
28 needed to provide funding assistance to eligible public schools as set forth in paragraph
29 (1) of this subsection, subject to the following conditions:

30 (A) No public school shall be considered eligible for such funding assistance unless:

31 (i) It complies with such policies, procedures, regulations, and other requirements as
32 adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to paragraph (3) of this subsection;

33 and

34 (ii) Its school safety plan meets the requirements of Code Section 20-2-1185; and

35 (B) The amount of funding assistance calculated for each eligible public school shall
36 not exceed:

37 (i) One percent of the total amount of funds allotted for such school under this article
38 for the most recently completed school year; or

39 (ii) Fifty percent of the actual costs incurred during the most recently completed
40 school year for the implementation of such school's safety plan; provided, however,
41 that the application of such condition shall be subject to the hardship provisions set
42 forth in subsection (b) of Code Section 20-2-1185.

43 (3) The State Board of Education shall adopt policies, procedures, regulations, and other
44 such requirements as appropriate:

45 (A) To determine whether a public school is eligible for funding assistance under this
46 subsection;

47 (B) To establish procedures and requirements for public schools seeking funding
48 assistance under this subsection;

49 (C) To establish procedures for the Department of Education to evaluate requests by
50 public schools for funding assistance under this subsection;

51 (D) To calculate the maximum amount of funding assistance each eligible public
52 school is eligible to receive under this subsection, subject to appropriations by the
53 General Assembly;

54 (E) To annually assess whether and to what extent funding assistance provided to
55 eligible public schools under this subsection is having the intended impact of reducing
56 school violence or improving school safety and security; and

57 (F) As may be necessary to implement the provisions of this subsection."

58 **SECTION 3.**

59 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2024, and shall be applicable beginning with the
60 2025-2026 school year and continuing each school year thereafter.

61 **SECTION 4.**

62 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.



DOAA

Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

January 4, 2024

Honorable Sandra Scott
State Representative
611-D Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

SUBJECT: Fiscal Note
House Bill 3 (LC 491046)

Dear Representative Scott:

This bill would amend the Quality Basic Education Act by enabling the State Board of Education to provide additional grants to local units of administration to support students living in poverty, as defined by the bill. The grant would equal 25% of the base QBE (Quality Basic Education) multiplied by the number of students living in poverty. The State Board of Education would establish school system eligibility for the grant. The bill has no effective date.

Data from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) indicates that the bill would have cost approximately \$391 million in FY 2024 (see **Table 1**). The amount is based on FY 2023 student data showing that 517,255 of the 1.7 million public school students would qualify. The FY 2024 base QBE weight is used. The amount assumes that every school system is eligible for the grant.

Table 1: Total Projected Grant Amount for One Year

Base QBE Weight	\$3,022.45
25% of Base QBE Weight	\$755.61
2023 Georgia K12 Student Poverty Count	517,255
Total Grant Amount	\$390,844,344

Respectfully,

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

Richard Dunn, Director
Office of Planning and
Budget

GSG/RD/ew



January 4, 2024

Honorable Viola Davis
State Representative
409-G Coverdell Legislative Office Bldg.
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

SUBJECT: Fiscal Note
House Bill 712 (LC 49 1079)

Dear Representative Davis:

This bill would revise the calculation and distribution of student transportation funds by the State Board of Education to school systems. It would require the calculation to include bus drivers' health insurance costs, other vehicles used to transport students, and students who live within 1.5 miles of schools but cannot walk safely or travel to school without a motor vehicle. The bill also increases the minimum salary for drivers. The State Board of Education would be required to distribute to each school system up to 100% of projected costs of the system's student transportation program.

As shown in Table 1, data provided by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) indicates that the bill would have cost the state an additional \$907.1 million if it had been enacted in FY24. While the full cost of the bill would be \$1.05 billion, a portion of that cost is offset by the existing funding for student transportation.

Table 1: Cost Breakdown of Projected Fiscal Impact	
Operations	\$557,084,928
Driver Salaries	283,759,366
Health Insurance	207,005,280
Bus Insurance	5,363,360
Funds for Extended Miles	2,097,450
Drug Testing	<u>578,654</u>
Total projected cost	<u>\$1,055,889,038</u>
Less: FY24 Pupil Transportation Grant	\$148,750,195
Additional Student Transportation Cost	<u>\$907,138,843</u>

The assumptions used to calculate the cost are discussed below.

- Data does not distinguish between students who can and cannot get to school safely, the estimate does not include students within 1.5-mile range of a school.

- Data does not exist on the use of school vehicles other than buses. As a result, this estimate only reflects the use of traditional school buses, and the cost would increase if other vehicles are included.
- Salaries, health insurance, and drug testing costs are based on updating the current pupil transportation formula based on the requirements outlined in this bill. Health insurance is based on the current per member per month rate, and future increases would result in additional costs to the state.
- GaDOE does not have current data to update the extended mileage portion of the calculation. Existing data is based on an older survey which would need to be updated to reflect the actual number.

Table 1 shows the projected cost for each year, assuming every category is expended at 100%.

Respectfully,



Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor



Richard Dunn, Director
Office of Planning and Budget

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of Audits & Accounts

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

January 3, 2024

Honorable Viola Davis
State Representative
404-D Coverdell Legislative Office Bldg.
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

SUBJECT: Fiscal Note
House Bill (LC 49 1549)

Dear Representative Davis:

This bill would establish Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding for services related to the Refugee and International Students Equalization (RISE) program beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Additionally, it provides that the RISE program weight would be 1.2 with a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 7.

As shown in **Table 1**, Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) data indicates that the bill would reduce state spending by \$62.2 million because students would be moved from QBE segments with higher program weights (e.g., Kindergarten, Grades 1-3 Early Intervention Program) into the RISE program. This amount is based on the student population of 57,309 full-time equivalents (FTEs) during state fiscal year 2024 meet RISE program criteria.

Table 1. RISE QBE weight reduces state costs

	FTEs	Average Funding per FTE	QBE System Earnings
Current Statute	57,309	\$4,712.68 ⁽¹⁾	\$270,079,996
LC 49 1549	57,309	\$3,626.95	\$207,857,929
Difference			-\$62,222,067

(1) Funding based on a combination of QBE weights tied to the variety of students

Additional Considerations


The estimate does not consider the proposed teacher-student ratio of 1 to 7. If the legislative intent is to fund the RISE program with a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 7, the QBE earnings for RISE would cost the state approximately \$277.1 million more than current QBE earnings. GaDOE noted the teacher-student ratio for the RISE program cannot be 1 to 7 and also have a program weight of 1.2 because the resulting QBE earnings would be more than 3 times (not about 1.2 times) greater than the base earnings.

Programs with a smaller teacher-student ratio and more specialized services have higher weights than that found in the bill. For example, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) has a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 7 and a statutory program weight of 2.5892. In contrast, the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education Program has a ratio of 1 to 20 and a statutory program weight of 1.1830.

Respectfully,



Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor



Richard Dunn, Director
Office of Planning and Budget

GSG/RD/ahs

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, the
2 "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to establish the Refugee and International Students
3 Equalization (RISE) program to provide for funding and wraparound services for eligible
4 students; to provide for the definition of "international student"; to establish a program
5 weight and teacher-student ratio for the RISE program in the QBE funding formula; to
6 provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date and applicability; to repeal
7 conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, the "Quality
11 Basic Education Act," is amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

12 "20-2-156.1.

13 (a) As used in this Code section, the term 'international student' means any school-age
14 child, regardless of his or her citizenship or immigration status, who:

15 (1) Was born outside of the United States;

16 (2) Currently resides in this state;

17 (3) Is currently enrolled in a public school in this state; and

18 (4) Within the previous 36 months, enrolled for the first time in a public school in this
19 state.

20 Such term shall include, but shall not be limited to, unaccompanied alien, asylum seeking,
21 and refugee children, as defined under federal immigration law, who meet the criteria set
22 forth in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this subsection.

23 (b) The State Board of Education shall create a program for international students, subject
24 to appropriation by the General Assembly. The purpose of such program is to provide
25 wraparound services, including education, housing, medical, counseling, nutrition, and
26 transportation services, directly to international students to support their elementary and
27 secondary education. The State Board of Education shall prescribe such rules and
28 regulations regarding eligibility criteria and standards as may be needed to carry out the
29 provisions of this Code section. This program may also be referred to as the Refugee and
30 International Students Equalization (RISE) program."

31 **SECTION 2.**

32 Said article is further amended in Code Section 20-2-161, relating to the Quality Basic
33 Education Formula, by revising subsection (b) as follows:

34 "(b) As the cost of instructional programs varies depending upon the teacher-student ratios
35 and specific services typically required to address the special needs of students enrolled,
36 state authorized instructional programs shall have the following program weights and
37 teacher-student ratios:

38	(1) Kindergarten program.	1.6724
39		weight and
40		1 to 15
41		ratio
42	(2) Kindergarten early intervention program.	2.0678
43		weight and
44		1 to 11
45		ratio
46	(3) Primary grades program (1-3).	1.2948
47		weight and
48		1 to 17
49		ratio
50	(4) Primary grades early intervention program (1-3).	1.8180
51		weight and
52		1 to 11
53		ratio
54	(5) Upper elementary grades program (4-5).	1.0390
55		weight and
56		1 to 23
57		ratio

58	(6) Upper elementary grades early intervention program (4-5).	1.8125
59		weight and
60		1 to 11
61		ratio
62	(7) Middle school program (6-8)..	1.1380
63		weight and
64		1 to 20
65		ratio
66	(8) High school general education program (9-12)	1.0000
67		weight and
68		1 to 23
69		ratio
70	(9) Career, technical, and agricultural education	
71	laboratory program (9-12).	1.1830
72		weight and
73		1 to 20
74		ratio
75	(10) Program for persons with disabilities:	
76	Category I.	2.4118
77		weight and
78		1 to 8
79		ratio

80 (11) Program for persons with disabilities:
 81 Category II. 2.8402
 82 weight and
 83 1 to 6.5
 84 ratio

85 (12) Program for persons with disabilities:
 86 Category III. 3.6188
 87 weight and
 88 1 to 5
 89 ratio

90 (13) Program for persons with disabilities:
 91 Category IV. 5.8710
 92 weight and
 93 1 to 3
 94 ratio

95 (14) Program for persons with disabilities:
 96 Category V. 2.4737
 97 weight and
 98 1 to 8
 99 ratio

100	(15) Program for intellectually gifted students:	
101	Category VI.	1.6794
102		weight and
103		1 to 12
104		ratio
105	(16) Remedial education program	1.3576
106		weight and
107		1 to 15
108		ratio
109	(17) Alternative education program	1.4881
110		weight and
111		1 to 15
112		ratio
113	(18) English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program	2.5892
114		weight and
115		1 to 7
116		ratio
117	<u>(19) Refugee and International Students Equalization (RISE) program.</u>	<u>1.2000</u>
118		<u>weight and</u>
119		<u>1 to 7</u>
120		<u>ratio"</u>

121 **SECTION 3.**

122 This Act shall become effective July 1, 2024, and shall be applicable beginning in the
123 2025-2026 school year and each school year thereafter.

124 **SECTION 4.**

125 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.