Budget Approved by Senate

The General Appropriations Act, House Bill 2 passed the Senate on 40-2 vote this afternoon. It will increase state spending by about $249 million over current levels – or roughly 4.1 percent. The House version was amended by the Senate Finance Committee. One of the amendments added $10 million to partially replace school district cash balances taken in last year's solvency legislation. Most public employees have not received a pay raise since 2014; the budget by the will provide about $90 million in total compensation increases. That includes a 2 percent salary increase for rank-and-file state workers and even larger pay bumps for State Police, corrections officers and judicial branch employees. Teachers would get a 2.5 percent pay raise, and starting teacher pay would go from $34,000 to $36,000 a year. Minimum pay levels for more experienced teachers would be raised as in Senate Bill 119 (see below). Other school employees would get a 2% raise. Another amendment requires that the Governor's merit pay plan be bargained in districts with collective bargaining. The budget plan also calls for more than 10 percent of state spending — or nearly $643 million — to be set aside in cash reserves. As it sits now, in addition to the funding for public education, the budget fully funds Medicaid—the health insurance program for low-income kids, seniors, and those with disabilities—and child care assistance.

Tomorrow the House Education Committee will hear Senate Bill 119 sponsored by Senator Mimi Stewart and co-sponsored by Senators Gay Kernan and Bill Soules. This measure will increase the minimum for each licensure tier for teachers as follows: tier 1: $36,000; tier 2: $44,000; and tier 3: $54,000. Call all committee members to support this important change.