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Two problematic bills:

SD.1209: An Act relative to innovation partnership zones, filed by Senator Eric Lesser

This bill would allow the state Commissioner and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to give control of schools to state-appointed boards that are not democratically accountable to residents. It applies to any district that has at least one school in level 4 or 5 of the state's 5-level rating system. These include Athol-Royalston, Boston, Fall River, Lawrence, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester. Anywhere from two to all of a district's schools could be given over to this board, not just level 4 or 5 schools.

The bill also allows School Committees themselves to give control of their schools to an appointed board if the district includes just one level 3 school. Roughly one fifth of the state's schools are in level 3. Again, this zone can include any district school, not just those in level 3.

An "Innovation Partnership Zone" is two or more schools in a district controlled by an appointed board with autonomy over staffing, budget, curriculum, and schedule.

There are two ways an Innovation Partnership Zone could be created:

On the initiative of the Education Commissioner, in any district with a level 4 school. The Commissioner appoints the board of directors, which draws up a plan. Changes to the union contract are negotiated, but if there is no agreement, the Commissioner has final say.

On the initiative of the School Committee in a district with a level 3 school. An individual or group draws up a plan, which includes the names of the zone's board of directors. The plan goes to a "screening committee" made up of representatives of the School Committee chair, the superintendent, and the union. The plan needs just two of the three votes, so the union can be overruled. Contract changes must be negotiated, and disagreements are decided by an arbitrator, but the decision must be consistent with the Innovation Partnership Zone plan – which requires no union approval.

HD.445 An Act to promote autonomy and success in schools, filed by Rep. Alice Peisch

This bill includes the Innovation Partnership Zone provisions of S.1209. It also contains provisions that essentially expand the number of schools subject to level 4 sanctions from the current four percent of the state's schools to ten percent.

HD445 does this by creating a new category, "priority" schools, which the Commissioner selects from schools with low state ratings. In priority schools, unions and school committees must bargain waivers to the contract – even before a turnaround plan is developed. If teachers vote down the waivers, the Commissioner can put the school into level 4, where management can change the contract unilaterally.

Citizens for Public Schools believes that democratic control and union safeguards are not obstacles, but are *essential* to quality education. No new laws are needed for school districts to grant autonomy to schools. Boston does that now for its pilot schools.

These bills would create new charter-like schools, after voters overwhelmingly defeated a ballot question to expand charters. They are the kinds of proposals we would expect from Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, not from public education supporters.