



14TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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March 22, 2017

Dear Governor, Speaker, and Senate President;

We, the representatives of the 14th District, join with the Monroe School Board and Township Municipal Government to demand fair state school aid funding for the Monroe School District. After eight years of cuts or flat funding, Monroe's schools, its students and our community are at a crossroads. We cannot wait for a new Governor or new leadership. We need relief this funding year. While many school districts may complain about their funding levels, we are sure you will agree Monroe is experiencing a unique and severe hardship under the current implementation of the state aid funding formula. Our residents are understandably frustrated, angry, and concerned about their future and that of our students.

Monroe has experienced 25% growth in student population over the last eight years. It's expected that growth will continue to increase steadily over the next 10 years. The state's growth caps that limit aid for growing school districts, combined with nearly a decade of flat funding and the continued provision of "hold harmless" Adjustment Aid to districts that should not be receiving it, has had a disastrous impact on Monroe property taxpayers. They must shoulder the heavy burden of enrollment growth without any concurrent growth in aid. Without the caps, Monroe is now funded at less than 35% of what it should receive under the formula. This is a loss of \$5 million in funding each year. State funding has now dropped to a dismal \$400 per student. It is abundantly clear that, on this issue alone, Monroe deserves fairness and relief.

In addition, Monroe's school district buses the overwhelming majority of its students -- over 93%. While student safety is paramount, busing is also required under state statute. Monroe has been repeatedly recognized as one of the most efficiently operated busing programs. However, the school district loses over \$1 million a year because the state also underfunds its transportation aid program. Monroe does not have the option or luxury to cut these state-mandated services; this is not courtesy busing. Monroe should not be penalized for following the law; it deserves fair funding and relief.

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Monroe is also recognized as one of the best districts in the state for educating children with special needs and as such has become something of a magnet for parents who seek the best educational opportunities for their special needs children. Unfortunately, the state has underfunded its commitment to our children with special needs – particularly those in the Extraordinary Special Education category – at an even greater percentage than general education funding. Monroe again is being penalized for its strong performance and the support of its residents. The impact of the growth of the special needs student population has been exacerbated by the continued provision of Adjustment Aid, which exempts other districts from cuts even though they are above certain funding levels in the state's education aid formula. These special needs students and the Monroe community deserve fair funding and relief.

Each of these issues can be resolved within the current funding formula, and should be targeted for relief in this budget cycle. Even if there is a phase-in of any school funding reform efforts, the above facts clearly demonstrate that Monroe should be in the front of the line for at least a down payment on the promise of fair funding and relief.

Finally, as you discuss education funding reform, please note that the current formula even if fully funded will continue to hurt communities with large populations of senior residents. The formula treats retirement income and property wealth held by retirees without distinction. We recognize that the upcoming increase in the exclusion for retirement income from the state income tax will be of some help. However, we still believe that any reforms should recognize that communities with more than 33% senior population need additional aid or at a minimum prioritization for funding relief. We have written, introduced and sought to advance legislation in recent years to do just that, though to date that legislation has not been successful. We ask for your support of this important legislation to move it through both houses of the Legislature so it can be placed on the Governor's desk for his signature. Reforms should recognize that our senior citizen taxpayers have been especially hard-hit by the failure of the state to fully fund the school aid formula, threatening their very ability to remain in in New Jersey.

Again, we can't wait for the next Governor to begin solving this problem. We join our voices to call for reform now. Our residents deserve it, our students need it, and fairness demands it. We stand ready to support any efforts to make a reality any reform that fixes these problems and brings relief to Monroe.

Sincerely,



Senator Linda R. Greenstein



Assemblyman Wayne P. DeAngelo



Assemblyman Daniel Benson