



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Owen H. Johnson

Senator Johnson Provides \$300,000 Grant For District Attorney's School Records Investigation

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Stepping up the effort for school accountability in Suffolk County, Senator Owen H. Johnson (4th Senate District), today announced a \$300,000 grant for Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas J. Spota to assist in his massive grand jury subpoena of the county's seventy school districts.

Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas J. Spota is currently sifting through volumes of school records in boxes dating back to 2001-02 - each containing budgets and expenditure reports on everything from construction projects to lunch programs, bilingual education, administrator salaries and perks, transportation, dropout prevention programs and more. Joining Senator Johnson and DA Spota at the announcement were Linette Sica, member of the PTA in the Lindenhurst School District, and Ron Smith, member of the NYSUT Board of Directors.

"Suffolk County residents have seen their hard-earned tax dollars mismanaged and misspent in many school districts across Long Island and I join with the taxpayers' call for reform and accountability," Senator Johnson said. "Inside the boxes in the Suffolk County District Attorney's office is the answer to a question asked by many taxpayers: 'Are our tax dollars being spent in the classroom?' I applaud DA Spota for taking on this enormous task. This extra funding will provide the added resources to get to the bottom of these boxes and ensure that our high school tax dollars are being spent in the classroom."

"I am grateful to Senator Johnson for exerting his considerable influence as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee in funding this office's investigation of corruption in Suffolk County School Districts - an investigation that has proved to be extensive as we go over the financial records of seventy school districts," said District Attorney Thomas J. Spota.

Prior to his grand jury subpoena, DA Spota's investigation into school districts resulted in 16 arrests of officials for scandals that included unauthorized trips, credit card use, health insurance for family members and other offenses at the expense of taxpayers' trust. DA Spota stated in January 2004 that the William Floyd School District was "plagued by fraud, theft, and abuses." It was there where the district treasurer had the freedom to write checks to himself plus sign, endorse and cash them. Another astonishing scandal was revealed with the arrest of the former superintendent of the Three Village School District who ran up tens of thousands of dollars on a district credit card.

"We expect our school taxes to pay for the education of our children and to be closely monitored by responsible administrators and our elected school boards," said Linette Sica. "Senator Johnson's grant will help District Attorney Spota and his team get to the bottom of this extensive project to help weed out fraud and mismanagement so we can be confident that our children are getting the full value for their education and our taxes aren't wasted or abused."

"For children, teachers and taxpayers, the classroom is the priority and districts can't afford to mispend valuable education dollars," said Ron Smith, Member of NYSUT Board of Directors and Past-President, Sayville Teachers Association. "I applaud Senator Johnson and District Attorney Spota for working together to ensure Suffolk's school districts are managed efficiently and effectively."