



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Sen. Young: Governor Veto Will Hurt Fredonia School District

CATHARINE YOUNG September 8, 2010

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ALBANY – Legislation that would authorize the Fredonia Central School District to receive state aid for an already approved and completed capital funded project was vetoed for the second year in a row by Governor Paterson earlier this week, according to the bill’s sponsor Senator Catharine Young (R, I, C – Olean).

“I am extremely disappointed by the Governor's veto of this bill. In the past, it has been the practice by every other New York State Governor to allow schools to recoup state aid that the State Education Department withheld for building projects due to paperwork filing mistakes,” said Senator Young.

“The school districts already is struggling to maintain its educational programs as a result of state aid cuts this year. The last two budgets have made a mess of things, and taxpayers and our students shouldn’t have to suffer,” she added.

During the work on a Final Cost Report (FCR) in 1998 for two separate security system projects, one at Wheelock Primary School and the other on the Main Street Campus no final cost reports were filed with the state education department as is required to receive state aid.

In 2008, after becoming aware of the omission that occurred in 1998, DiFonzo immediately contacted SED and took the necessary steps to complete and submit the long overdue report. A special waiver was granted for one of the projects, but the School District was informed special legislation was required to address the error for a capital improvement project involving electrical work and asbestos removal on Main Street, for which the school district had already received \$894,000 worth of state aid.

Superintendent Paul DiFonzo said, "I am deeply disappointed because I feel that our district has done everything it can do to resolve this issue. I don't think it is fair for our taxpayers to be punished over a clerical error from ten years ago. We will continue to pursue this issue with the help of our legislators."

Senator Young said at no time over the nine-year period since it was due did SED inform the school district that the final cost report was not submitted by the district, nor did they withhold any state aid at anytime concerning this project, which is what is typically done if the final cost report is not filed on time.

"Only when the School District did the right thing and reported the problem as soon as it was discovered did the Governor's office finally decide to punish them for it. This is typical Albany bureaucracy and red tape at its worst," said Senator Young.

In 2009 and again this year, Senator Young passed legislation in the Senate that would allow the Education Department to consider the final cost report legalized, validated, ratified and confirmed. The bill would require also that the Fredonia School district to pay back \$893,478 of building aid received for the one project to the state and eventually the district would be reimbursed by the state sometime in the future when the funds became available.

Senator Young plans to reintroduce a similar bill next year and said. "I will continue to try to fix this because it is simply unfair to the taxpayers and the students."

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