



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Senator Murphy: Study Of RCI Will Aid Westchester Schools In Getting Their Fair Share

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Albany, NY - Westchester County, Long Island and New York City may all be in the same state, but as the old saying goes, comparing the cost of living in each area is like comparing apples to oranges. Unfortunately, when it comes to school aid, Westchester County is thrown in the same bushel as areas where the cost of living is lower. In order to level the playing field, Senator Terrence Murphy has sponsored S6310A, a bill that directs the State Education Department to study, review and report on the appropriateness of keeping of Westchester County in the Hudson Valley region's Regional Cost Index (RCI) for purposes of calculating foundation aid. The education department is tasked with reporting its findings to Governor Cuomo and the legislature by April 1, 2019.

Although data that is more relevant exists, the RCI is based on information compiled in 2006. The RCI was created to provide a boost to property owners living in counties where the cost of living is higher. Westchester, however, has been grouped in a seven-county region with the more rural, and less costly, counties, including Ulster, Sullivan, Dutchess and Orange. Currently, the seven-county group has an RCI of 1.314, a lower rate than Long Island and New York City, which have RCI's of 1.425. In 2016, the State of New York enacted a minimum wage policy that recognized the higher cost of living in Westchester County and included the county in with Long Island for accelerated wage growth with the rest of the Hudson Valley's wage growth equal to the rest of the state. This set a new labor market precedent that must be considered for school aid purposes.

"A region's cost of living is an important factor in determining state funding levels. Although Westchester's cost of living is similar to that of New York City and Long Island, which was reinforced when we enacted the minimum wage increase, this is not reflected in our state aid funding formula," said Senator Murphy. "The outdated education-aid formula puts our region at a disadvantage. This legislation is all about leveling the playing field, making sure schools in our region get the share of funding they deserve."

Mary Fox Alter, Superintendent of Schools for the Pleasantville School District said, "We thank Senator Murphy for listening to our concerns regarding the Regional Cost Index. We are hopeful this study will result in changes that reflect the true cost of living for this region."

Lisa Davis, Executive Director of the Westchester-Putnam School Board Association stated, "Our district has been recognized for the quality of its programs as well as for our student's achievements. While we are proud of our programs, students and staff, we continue to struggle to marshal the resources to help our students succeed. We've been strong advocates for changing the RCI. There's no logic to the current system. If you break down by counties, Westchester should have a higher rate than Suffolk County. Now that we have recognized the problem, we need to take the next step; providing an equitable solution for Westchester and Putnam schools."

In a June 7, 2006 report to the board of regents subcommittee on state aid, State Education Department staff noted in the combination of the city of New York and Long Island that there was "evidence that these two areas actually function as a single labor market region. With professionals, especially those in the education professions, moving to jobs across the lines between New York City and Long Island, it is necessary to consider this entire region as a single area, with similar wage costs". At this same time, the State Education Department decided to keep the county of Westchester within the Hudson Valley for the regional cost index calculation.

The legislation passed unanimously in the Senate 61-0 and has been sent to the Assembly for consideration.