

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY 12247



PATRICK M. GALLIVAN

February 8, 2013

Hon. Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
The Capital
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

As you know, every school in this state has seen a reduction in school aid over the past few years, as part of a comprehensive rebalancing of the State budget, through the mechanism of the gap elimination adjustment (GEA). The initial GEA was distributed in an unfair manner that reduced per pupil funding significantly in low-wealth school districts. We appreciate the work you have done over the last two budget cycles to reduce the GEA applied to such districts' school aid. We were pleased to see that this year's executive budget continues to drive increases in school aid to high-need school districts.

However, we are concerned that a number of the low-wealth school districts we represent are not receiving adequate increases in funding this year. While high-need urban schools such as Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse received restorations to GEA cuts of over forty percent, many of the low-wealth school districts that we represent received GEA restorations of less than ten percent. The thinning property tax bases and low household incomes in these low-wealth school districts hinder their ability to raise the revenue required to fund a sound education, especially as these districts seek to keep their tax levies below the tax cap.

We believe it is essential that we work within the constraints of this year's budget to provide further support to low-wealth school districts in order to allow them to provide their students with a sound education without exceeding the property tax cap. We have two recommendations for modifying the executive budget. Our first recommendation is to target fiscal stabilization grants at school districts with combined wealth ratios below the state average that will receive GEA restorations less than the state average of 14.9% of their 2012 GEA. Our second recommendation is to delay the \$75 million of competitive program grants. While we are supportive of the ambitious changes these grants aim to bring about, we believe that these funds should be used to reduce the GEA of low-wealth school districts receiving GEA restorations of less than the state average of 14.9%. These changes will ensure that low-wealth school districts can continue to provide their students with a sound basic education.

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While we support the overall amount of school aid in the executive budget and the concept of targeting GEA restorations at high-need school districts, we believe these changes would have a tremendous positive impact on low-wealth schools and the communities in which they are located. It would allow our schools to continue to provide students a quality education while living within the constraints of the tax cap. The alternatives, substandard education or higher tax levies, are unacceptable.

We look forward to working with you to enact a budget that provides all students across the state with an opportunity for a quality education.

Sincerely,



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State Senator, 40th District



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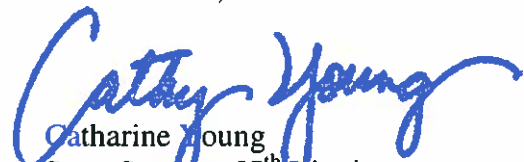
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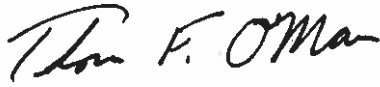
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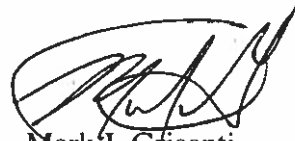
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CC: Senator Dean G. Skelos, Majority Coalition Leader
Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, Majority Coalition Leader
De'Shawn Wright, Deputy Secretary for Education
Lisa Timoney, Chief of School Aid and Education