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THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



**PATRICK M. GALLIVAN**  
Senator, 59th District

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February 13, 2012

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

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Working together we were able to achieve real progress in last year's budget, but much remains to be done. As we begin the process of developing a budget for the coming fiscal year, we believe that it is crucial to focus on the unique needs and challenges of the low wealth rural schools that we represent.

In December we wrote to you about the difficulties such school districts are facing. Thinning tax bases and low household incomes in many of the rural school districts we represent result in combined wealth ratios totaling less than half of the state average. This hinders the ability of these school districts to raise the revenue required to fund a sound education. At the same time, the existing formula for state aid is based on a scale that treats the poorest districts the same as it treats districts whose residents earn twice as much. The combination of limited local resources and a state aid formula which does not fully take this fact into account has put immense pressure on many of the school districts we represent, and we asked that you address the inequity of this funding in your executive budget.

We were pleased to see that the executive budget provided for a \$290 million increase in general school aid which is targeted at high need school districts, including low wealth rural schools, and an additional \$265 million for reimbursement of expense-based aid programs. It is encouraging to see that 76 percent of the increase in aid will be directed at high need school districts. This increase in aid will surely help the low wealth rural school districts that we represent, but it only partially restores last year's budget cuts, which were especially harsh on rural schools.

We believe it is in the best interest of the students and school districts that we represent that any funds available for education are spent restoring last year's cuts before we experiment with innovations to improve the education system. While we are supportive of targeting grants to achieve academic gain and management efficiency, we feel it is more important to ensure our schools are able to provide a sound basic education. Toward this end, we are proposing that the

State delay the competitive grant program outlined in the executive budget and instead use these funds to further bolster general support aid. Specifically, we would like to see this amount allocated to school districts in a similar proportion to how the executive budget allocates the \$290 million to general support.

Doing so would have a tremendous positive impact on low wealth rural schools and the communities they are located in. 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 busted tax caps and unsustainable levies, are unacceptable.

Performance grants have the potential to improve our education system in the long term but our rural schools need help now. We fully support the use of grants to further academic gain and management efficiency as soon as we can be assured that all our schools, and our rural school districts in particular, have the resources to provide a quality education. After last year's cuts, we do not yet feel that we are at that point.

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, including those that live in rural school districts.

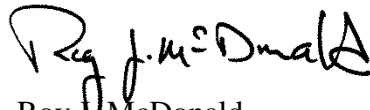
Sincerely,



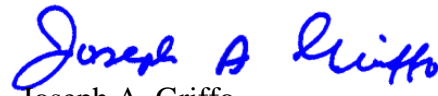
Thomas W. Libous  
State Senator, 52<sup>nd</sup> District



George D. Maziarz  
State Senator, 62<sup>nd</sup> District



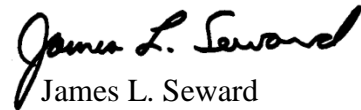
Roy J. McDonald  
State Senator, 43<sup>rd</sup> District



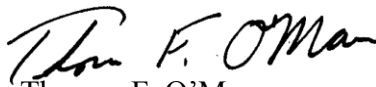
Joseph A. Griffo  
State Senator, 47<sup>th</sup> District



Patricia A. Ritchie  
State Senator, 48<sup>th</sup> District



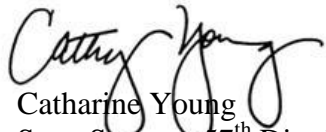
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Michael F. Nozzolio  
State Senator, 54<sup>th</sup> District



Catharine Young  
State Senator, 57<sup>th</sup> District



Mark J. Grisanti  
State Senator, 60<sup>th</sup> District



Patrick M. Gallivan  
State Senator, 59<sup>th</sup> District



Michael H. Ranzenhofer  
State Senator, 61<sup>st</sup> District

CC: Senator Dean Skelos, President Pro Tempore  
David Wakelyn, Deputy Secretary for Education  
Lisa Timoney, Chief of School Aid and Education