

Budget Hearing Testimony – Stephen Beovich

Good Morning and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Stephen Beovich, and I am the President of the New York State Coalition of Special Act School Districts and the Superintendent of Schools at Mount Pleasant Blythedale UFSD, A Special Act School District in Westchester that serves medically fragile children.

First I would like to express our sincere gratitude for the additional school safety allocation we received, as well as for the thoughtful changes you have approved to the rate-setting methodology over the past several years.

The safety allocation has allowed special act schools to begin to implement the same critical safety features found in traditional public schools. At Mount Pleasant Blythedale we are using these funds to construct secure entrance vestibules and implement a comprehensive lockdown system—improvements that directly enhance the safety of our students and staff.

The changes to the rate-setting methodology have also been instrumental in strengthening our financial stability. These include the ability to retain reserve funds and, most recently, the passage of legislation allowing us to retain interest and investment income earned on those reserves. Combined with the growth rates awarded over the past four years, these changes have enabled our districts to plan responsibly and focus resources where they are needed most. As a result of these targeted improvements, the Special Act schools believe the current methodology is now workable.

We are aware that a tuition rate methodology study is underway. While we previously supported a comprehensive overhaul, we now respectfully urge caution. We are advocating for only common-sense adjustments and continued incremental changes, as this committee and the rate-setting unit has done over the past few years. We are concerned that the study could unintentionally reverse provisions that have contributed to our current stability. We ask for your support in preserving these critical elements.

Finally, we recognize that this year's state budget will be tighter due to reductions in federal funding. We respectfully remind the committee that Special Act schools serve the most vulnerable students in the state. Every additional dollar we receive through growth rates is reinvested directly into our programs to support those students—through additional staff, expanded mental health services, career and technical education programs, instructional specialists, and interscholastic sports.

As you finalize this year's budget, we ask that you keep these students in mind. Any growth rate you approve will go directly toward meeting their complex needs and helping them succeed. Thank you for your time and consideration.