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CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM,

PARKS & RECREATION

TRANSPORTATION

RECEIVED  
OCT 21 2011  
Initial: 

October 18, 2011

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

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Over the past few months, I have had occasion to meet with several school superintendents in my district, and I have become aware of a potential crisis looming as a result of a "perfect storm" of cuts in state aid and the newly enacted property tax cap that is unique to rural areas.

Most of the rural school districts in Central New York have already undertaken measures that have been suggested to deal with cuts years ago, including consolidation of administrative support, sports teams, and purchasing, with neighboring districts. In addition, six districts are exploring plans for full consolidation.

Teachers and administrators are willing to work together to cut costs; in addition to many teaching positions eliminated through attrition or termination, they have voluntarily frozen their wages. Extra-curricular activities have been eliminated, non-academic programs severely cut. But costs out of the districts' control--health insurance and TRS/ERS—are increasing steadily.

So, these small, rural school districts are quickly using their already lean reserves to support core functions such as transportation, book purchasing and basic technology.

Most of the districts have been living under a *de facto* property tax cap for several years, holding increases to below four percent each year. Many of the districts are in small towns which lack public sewer and water systems, and therefore cannot attract businesses to locate there, severely limiting the funds that can be raised through property tax revenue by virtue of location alone.

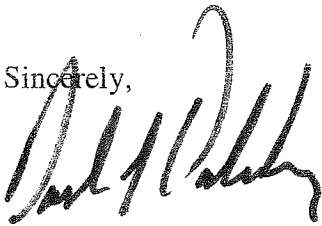
For example, in the Fabius-Pompey district, a two percent tax increase would yield \$154,000. Assuming flat school aid and further reductions to its operating budget, with the mandated increases I mentioned above, the district is estimating a \$1.3 million budget gap. The district does not have enough in reserve funds to sustain it.



Unfortunately, Fabius-Pompey is not unique; the other rural districts in Central New York are in grave danger of insolvency in the next two to three years despite excellent fiscal management and creative thinking by administrators, teachers, parents and the community.

As you craft the 2012 Executive Budget, I urge you to consider the unintended consequences that are threatening the existence of rural schools. If you would like more information, I would be pleased to convene a meeting of rural school superintendents in Central New York to share their information firsthand with your administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Valesky". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

David J. Valesky  
State Senator

DJV/jad

cc: Interested parties