

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 Vice President of the Special Act Coalition and the Superintendent of Schools at Mount Pleasant Cottage School UFSD, A Special Act School District in Westchester.

First, I would like to thank Governor Hochul for including the eleven percent growth in tuition for special education providers in the budget. However, I want to make the legislator aware that currently, due to the rate-setting methodology, no special education provider will see this growth in their tuition rate at the beginning of the fiscal year and very few will see the growth rate at all throughout the year. As a matter of fact, no special education providers have received the four percent promised in this year's budget because, as of today, the rate-setting methodology for the current fiscal year has not been released.

Annually the State Education Department proposes to the division of budget the inclusion of an interim plus rate which would ensure that approved growth rates are being applied to tuition rates at the beginning of the fiscal year. Every year this is rejected, and schools do not receive the funds they desperately need that have already been approved in the budget. There are schools that have not received any growth dating back to 2011 because of complications with the rate reconciliation process. With the governor ready to invest 240 million dollars into special education programs next year, I am asking that there is assurance that all providers receive their funds by having the eleven percent tuition growth automatically added to their tuition rate on July 1. Without this being put in place, many of these schools that serve the state's neediest and most vulnerable students will not see any additional funds next year. If 240 million dollars is approved, 240 million dollars should be disbursed. Please stop technicalities keeping funds from these schools, which directly affect the services we can provide our students.

I also must ask that the 18.42 percent state share for CSE placements outside of New York City not be eliminated as proposed by the governor. The school districts rely on these funds to send their neediest students to our programs. The enrollment in our programs over the past two years, when this state share was temporarily eliminated, has dropped. Students are getting to our programs later, which delays getting them the intensive services they need. Please do not include the governor's proposal in your budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.