



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

Important Proposed Constitutional Amendment - Proposition 1 - to be Considered by Voters on November Ballot

SENATOR SHELLEY MAYER November 3, 2023

| ISSUE: **FUNDING FOR SMALL CITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

(ALBANY, NY) – This year’s election day ballot will include a proposed amendment to the New York State Constitution, named Proposition 1, which, if approved, would remove the special constitutional debt limitation placed only on small city school districts. Small city school districts, defined as school districts in cities with fewer than 125,000 residents, are subject to a constitutional debt limit of five percent of the average full valuation of taxable real estate. By contrast, most other school districts have no constitutional debt limit but are subject to a 10 percent debt limit set by law. If adopted, this change would apply the same debt limit to small city school districts as rural and suburban districts.

In Senate District 37, there are three “small city school districts,” Rye City School District, New Rochelle City School District, and White Plains City School District. These districts, and those listed [here](#), are currently subject to the five percent constitutional debt limit.

Small city school districts serve almost 200,000 students in New York State, and their students are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than their counterparts in other fiscally independent districts.

The current five percent constitutional debt limit impacts the ability of small city school districts to conduct building maintenance, renovate buildings, update technology, and even address health and safety issues like asbestos abatement. Small city school districts are also not allowed to use state building aid to offset their debt limit, further restricting their ability to borrow for capital projects.

New York State Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, "I am pleased my colleague Assemblymember McDonald and I were able to put forth this constitutional amendment to ensure fiscally independent school districts across New York State face the same rules as most other districts. All voters this year must make their voice heard on this matter by flipping their ballot over and voting yes or no on this constitutional amendment."

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III, RPh said, "The constitutional amendment for small city school district debt limits will even the playing field for New York's 57 small city school districts. By allowing these schools to have a simplified process for much needed infrastructure improvements we make our schools safer, healthier, and more beneficial for our children. Thank you to Senator Shelley Mayer for sponsoring the constitutional amendment with me and for supporting this common sense parity measure."

These special rules date back to when there were other distinctions between small city school districts and suburban and rural ones. Before 1997, small city school districts did not need to seek approval from voters on their annual budgets. Now, small city school districts are subject to the same rules for budget approval and the property tax cap as other fiscally independent school districts but remain constrained by a much lower debt limit.

The constitutional amendment, passed by two consecutive Legislatures, must now receive approval from a majority of voters on November 7 to take effect. If approved, this constitutional amendment will not affect residents outside of small city school districts.

