



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

Lanza and Island Electeds Continue Fight Against Proposed Bus Cuts to Students

ANDREW J LANZA August 23, 2010

Call for certainty that buses will be there for students this fall

Senator Andrew Lanza and eight of his colleagues on Staten Island made a bipartisan call to the City to abandon its plan to eliminate bus service for seventh and eighth graders across the Island.

In a joint letter to Mayor Bloomberg signed by Rep. Michael E. McMahon, Borough President James Molinaro, Senator Diane Savino, Assembly Member Matthew Titone, Assembly Member Janelle Hyer-Spencer, Councilman Vincent Ignizio, Councilman James S. Oddo and Councilwoman Debi Rose, the elected officials called upon the Mayor to permanently retain the bus service for the approximately 3,000 Island students who rely upon it. Specifically, they urged the Mayor to supplement the budget shortfall with the funds allotted for New York in the *Education Jobs and Medicaid Assistance Act*, which passed both houses of Congress during an emergency session two weeks ago and has already been signed into law by President Obama.

The Department of Education (DOE) announced in May its intention to eliminate the variance that allows Staten Island 7th and 8th grade students to ride DOE provided bus service. In response, Council Members Ignizio, Oddo and Rose sought help from the New York State Courts, and on Monday, August 16, 2010, State Supreme Court Judge John Fusco issued a temporary restraining order in the case to prevent the City from eliminating service.

"This cut will hit Staten Island harder than any other borough, as our students live further away from school, on average, than any other students in New York City. This is not only a matter of inconvenience that will add to the traffic nightmare we already face, but more importantly it threatens the safety of our students," **said Senator Lanza (R)**.

"The start of the school year is quickly approaching, yet there are many parents on Staten Island who are in this standstill. Right now, the bus variances are scheduled to continue thanks to the recent Court decision, but these parents are left to worry that their child might not have access to the transportation needed to get them to school in a few weeks or months," **said Rep. McMahon (D)**. "The cost-benefit analysis does not fall on the City's side; the potential savings are outweighed by the impact the cuts would have on Island families and the safety of our children. Both the House and Senate just passed legislation to prevent this exact situation. Why isn't the City using those funds to stave off these cuts?"

"With the lack of transit options on Staten Island; the City seeks to deny 7th and 8th graders the basic need to travel to and from school," **Senator Savino (D) noted**. "I join community leaders from every party and shore of Staten Island to applaud Judge Fusco's decision and demand the City comply with his ruling."

"Part of our commitment to education is providing our children with a way to get to school. Yellow buses are a necessity, not a luxury for Staten Island students, and we must do everything we can to protect this

service," **stated Assemblyman Titone (D)**

Said Assemblyman Cusick (D), "Staten Island has less mass transit options than any other borough, making it difficult for students to get to school. Parents fear placing their twelve and thirteen year old children on mass transit. We need to do what is in the best interest of our students and keep bus services." "Funding cuts that have a direct and negative impact on our children's education should only be made when no other options are available. Clearly, this is not the case in this instance with new federal education funding being recently approved," **said Assemblyman Tobacco (R,I,C)**.

Said Councilman Ignizio (R), "The DOE has an obligation to provide safe transport for their students. \$ 1.6 million is not a large amount compared to a \$500 million shortfall, especially when that savings puts kids at risk."

Councilman Oddo (R) said, "All of this heartache in order to save \$1.6 million? I guess that is a dollar for each way our off-Island government does not understand the unique needs and challenges of our community."

"While the economic situation has certainly changed over the last two years, the need for yellow bus service for students on Staten Island has not. Given Staten Island has no subway system and many critical public bus routes have recently fallen under the knife of MTA cuts, affected families would be devastated should DOE not provide yellow bus service this coming school year for 7th and 8th graders," **said**

Councilwoman Rose (D).

The August 19th letter, the text of which can be found below, was also sent to Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, Chancellor Joel Klein, Deputy Mayor Howard Wolfson, Michelle Goldstein and Haeda Mihaltses.

August 19, 2010

The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg

Mayor, City of New York

City Hall

New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

As the school year approaches we have been steadfast in our opposition to your Administration's plans to cut school bus services for seventh and eighth grade students on Staten Island. On August 16, 2010, State Supreme Court Judge John Fusco issued a temporary restraining order to prevent the City from eliminating service to the approximately 2,940 students on Staten Island who depend on school buses to get to class. We applaud this decision.

As elected officials we are concerned to what the City's next step is and the uncertainty that surrounds this issue for parents and students as the school year is about to begin. As you know Staten Island is the least served by mass transit of any Borough and this is the reason why since 1968 the City has provided a variance to allow seventh and eighth graders bus service to get to school. While we recognize that the City, as well as all levels of government needs to tighten its fiscal belt during this trying economic time we are concerned that the cost savings of \$1.6 million is a disproportionate sacrifice to Staten Island students and families.

Recently the Congress passed and the President signed into law legislation to give New York City funding for education and Medicaid reimbursement to make up for shortfalls in the City budget. This additional money from the Federal government, while not funding all shortfalls in the budget, goes a long way to helping New York City through this challenging economic time. We urge the City to leverage this Federal assistance to free up other resources to continue school bus service for Staten Island children.

While we applaud your approach to fiscal soundness that has enhanced New York City's preeminence we urge you to permanently rescind these bus cuts. Parental anxiety and concern for their children's safety as well as mass confusion and increased traffic around our schools are conditions we are

confident your administration hopes to avoid

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael E. McMahon, Member of Congress

James A. Molinaro, Borough President

Andrew Lanza, State Senator

Diane Savino, State Senator

Matthew J. Titone, Assembly Member

Janelle Hyer-Spencer, Assembly Member

Michael Cusick, Assembly Member

Lou Tobacco, Assembly Member

Vincent Ignizio, Council Member

James S. Oddo, Council Member

Debi Rose, Council Member

cc: Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott

Chancellor Joel Klein

Deputy Mayor Howard Wolfson

Michelle Goldstein

Haeda Mihaltses

###