



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

Senator Martins' School Bus Mandate Relief Act Passes Senate

JACK M. MARTINS June 17, 2011

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In an effort to provide schools with mandate relief, Senator Jack M. Martins introduced a bill in the Senate that would allow boards of education to reduce the number of seats provided for student transportation if the seats aren't being used by students. The measure was passed by the Senate on Friday and is expected to save school districts millions of dollars.

“The School Bus Mandate Relief Act,” (S.4434) was introduced by Senator Martins in response to a call by school districts for relief when it comes to state mandates. The bill allows the board of education of a school district to reduce the number of seats if there is a documented history of the actual number of riders in each in each of the preceding three years, showing a consistent pattern of eligible pupils not using the transportation provided by the district.

“By providing school districts with mandate relief, it’s a win for our taxpayers. All students who are eligible to receive transportation should receive it. But if there is a pattern of some students not using it, school districts should not be forced to incur that expense,” said Senator Martins. “The result will be a saving to our school districts, which will ultimately be a savings to our taxpayers.”

One bus for a high school in Port Washington has 66 seats, yet only 12 students were riding it. In the Port Washington School District, half the seats in the buses the district provides are empty simply because the district is required to provide the seats regardless of whether the students are using the bus.

"The law requiring a seat for every student is ludicrous and presumes that intelligent school districts would purposely under-represent ridership and risk student safety to save dollars. On the contrary, we would choose to provide parents a direct opt out questionnaire and would provide a minimum of 20 percent additional seating for student ridership,” said Port Washington School Superintendent Dr. Geoffrey Gordon. “The savings to our district is projected to be between \$1.5 and \$2 million dollars, which would directly be applied to reducing taxpayer burden and would be of direct and immediate benefit to taxpayers, student programs, and staff to deliver those programs.”

The measure is sponsored in the New York State Assembly by Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel.

“We very much appreciate the work of the Senate and Assembly. Great Neck is very lucky to have Senator Martins and Assemblywoman Schimel leading the charge. If this mandate relief is enacted, it has great symbolic value as it will be the first time an unfunded mandate has been rescinded. It also has a real financial impact on our school district,” said Great Neck School Superintendent Dr. Tom Dolan.

“In Port Washington, we have been advocating for this change in mandate for the past eight years, and are grateful to Senator Martins for sponsoring this legislation now,” said Dr. Gordon.

“We applaud the Senator’s efforts. This would be a big cost-savings measure for our district. It’s great to have a man who is working for the children of our community,” said Al Harper, Superintendent of Schools for the Elmont School District.

As the chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Local Governments, Senator Martins has taken the lead on seeking ways to provide mandate relief to school districts and local governments.

“I really appreciate Senator Martins’ help with this issue. This has been a long time coming. This measure hurt no one and saves taxpayers money,” said Herricks School Superintendent Dr. John Bierwirth.

“Thank you to Senator Martins. We are pleased to see common sense prevail,” said Manhasset School Superintendent Charles Cardillo.

“In light of the fact that the tax cap may be a reality, we need to provide our school districts and local governments with relief from state mandates so that they can keep tax levy increases to a minimum. Our taxpayers will greatly benefit, especially during this difficult economic time,” said Senator Martins. “I want to thank Assemblywoman Schimel for

sponsoring this important measure in the Assembly. With the Assemblywoman and I working together, I am confident this measure will become law.”