



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

MAJOR VICTORY FOR SPACKENKILL COMMUNITY

SUSAN SERINO November 8, 2019

| ISSUE: **SCHOOL FUNDING, EDUCATION, LOCAL TAXES**

POUGHKEEPSIE, NY—Senator Sue Serino and Assemblymember Didi Barrett today announced that their bill requiring the state to forgive a penalty of over \$5 million levied against Spackenkill Union Free School District (Spackenkill) has been signed into law.

Senator Sue Serino said, "The signing of this bill is a major win for the Spackenkill community. Since being made aware of the excessive penalty levied against Spackenkill, we have been working diligently with the district to help them resolve the issue legislatively. In signing this bill today, the Governor did right by our students and our local taxpayers, and I join the members of our community in thanking him for this important action. I especially want to thank the Spackenkill community for never giving up the fight. Today we are reminded of all that we can accomplish when committed partners at every level come together to achieve a common goal."

Assemblymember Barrettsaid, "The education of our children should never be put at risk because of an administrative mistake. The penalty levied against Spackenkill was excessive, especially for a small school district that works hard to ensure our kids can learn, flourish and grow. I thank the Governor for hearing our concerns and signing this bill so that the Spackenkill community can invest in its students, faculty and educational programs rather than paying off an unreasonable and arbitrary fine."

Spackenkill Superintendent, Dr. Mark Villanti said, "We are grateful for the Governor's signature supporting our bill, which was approved unanimously by the Senate and Assembly. We want to thank Senator Serino, Assemblymember Barrett, and all their legislative staff, as well as the New York State School Boards Association, and all the members of the school community who wrote to the Governor in support of this endeavor. With the passing of this bill, we will continue to have the financial resources to maintain our standards of excellence. I am proud to be part of the Spackenkill community and thankful for all of you who have been a part of this monumental effort. This is a special day."

The penalty was part of the state's efforts to recoup nearly half of the \$10.7 million in funding used by the district to fund a capital project that was finalized nearly a decade ago. The project in question made improvements to classrooms, handicapped bathrooms and an elevator at Spackenkill High School.

The state has argued that a necessary final cost report associated with the project was not filed by the district in time to meet a deadline set by the State Education Department. However, the school district made a good faith effort to comply with the deadline, but was unable to as a result of backlogs at SED.

The current superintendent was made aware of this significant penalty in 2018 by Senator Serino's office, after she was alerted thanks to the efforts of an outside education organization. Upon learning of the penalty, Senator Serino and Assemblymember Barrett came together to introduce the legislation in support of the school community.

With many school districts in the state facing this same issue, Senator Serino and Assemblymember Barrett joined a number of their colleagues to successfully push for a reduction in the penalty amounts owed by districts throughout New York in the 2018-19 State Budget. This measure brought the penalty from over \$9,000,000 down to \$5,516,470. Despite that notable progress, Spackenkill's penalty remained one of the largest reported in the state, and would amount to approximately 12% of the district's annual budget and 55% of their projected State Aid for this year.

The bill passed unanimously in both the Senate and the Assembly in June. The law signed today, which Senator Serino and Assemblymember Barrett have been fighting tirelessly for, forgives the remaining amount of the penalty. With the bill set to take effect immediately, the legislation restores financial stability to Spackenkill schools, and spares district students and residents from potential cuts in education services or increases in taxes.

RELATED LEGISLATION

2019-S1239A

- Introduced

- ◦ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Legalizes, validates, ratifies and confirms the actions of the Spackenkill Union Free School District regardless of the failure of such district to timely file final building cost reports

January 11, 2019

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Susan Serino**

Do you support this bill?