



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Wins Aid Forgiveness for Mahopac Schools

PETE HARCKHAM April 2, 2020

| ISSUE: **2020-2021 NEW YORK STATE BUDGET, STATE AID, EDUCATION, MAHOPAC CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**



Albany, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham announced today that he was able to successfully place into the 2020-2021 State Budget a provision that forgives the Mahopac Central School District for an administrative error that was set to cost the district’s taxpayers close to \$6 million.

“I want to sincerely thank Governor Andrew Cuomo and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for their willingness to incorporate Mahopac penalty forgiveness into the

budget,” said Harckham. “This would not have happened without their willing partnership. In this incredibly stressful economic climate, the burdens on school districts and taxpayers are even more pronounced, and so I am pleased to have helped in this regard. The Mahopac schools were unfairly singled out for paperwork mistakes made nine years ago, and the financial penalties were going to end up affecting taxpayers, students and district administration who were not even in the district when the mistakes occurred. Getting this right for Mahopac residents was a big priority for me.”

The forgiveness provision was negotiated by Harckham into the Education, Labor and Family Assistance Article VII Legislation (ELFA) section of the 2020-2021 New York State Budget.

“From the moment this administrative error was identified and we self-reported it to the State, I have been working closely with my fellow District administrators, the Board of Education, and Senator Harckham to rectify the situation,” said Mahopac Central School District Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo. “Our approach has been to prepare for the worst, hope for the best, and communicate transparently with the community every step of the way. I am delighted with this outcome, which unburdens the taxpayers of the Mahopac Central School District and positions my administration to build a budget for next year and the near future that both supports the needs of our community and ensures the caliber of education to which we are all committed, even in these challenging financial times. I thank the Senator for his partnership and his commitment to seeing this situation through to resolution. This is a great day for Mahopac.”

Last year, the Mahopac Central School District sought forgiveness for administrative errors during the 2011-2012 school year that led to incorrect information being submitted for eight capital improvement projects that received state funding. Upon learning that the errors made, the district also was notified that it would have to repay \$3.1 million it has received so

far for building projects. In addition, the district would no longer be eligible for \$2.7 million of funding promised by the state for the projects.

Harckham noted that when the state changed the application process in 2011 for school districts applying for building aid there was some confusion, and a number of districts submitted applications with errors. Because the monetary penalty for Mahopac's error was significant enough to force the district to seriously reconsider spending priorities in the upcoming years, and possibly cut staff or programs, Harckham introduced legislation that would grant the district forgiveness.

"In this case, two wrongs were definitely not going to make the situation right," Harckham said.

The Mahopac school's forgiveness bill was passed by the state legislature in 2019, but vetoed last November. Harckham promised the district he would keep up the fight, and re-introduced the legislation this year. During the deliberations on the state budget, Harckham was in Albany and able to get the necessary provision added to the ELFA.