



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

Zebrowski and Reichlin-Melnick Pass Bill to Strengthen East Ramapo Oversight Powers

[ELIJAH REICHLIN-MELNICK](#) June 10, 2021

NEW CITY, NY - Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski (D-Rockland) and Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick (D-Rockland/Westchester) announced that their legislation to strengthen the East Ramapo Central School District Monitor's oversight authority has passed the full legislature (A5683B/S6052B).

The East Ramapo School District has faced unique challenges for a number of years, with a long history of governance and financial issues which precipitated the need for oversight several years ago. In 2015 Assemblyman Zebrowski sponsored and passed an oversight monitor bill through the Assembly that failed to pass the Senate. In 2016, a compromise bill, also championed by Zebrowski, became law and has provided five years of oversight by monitors in the district. In the years since, the district's continuing problems have prompted Zebrowski and Reichlin-Melnick to introduce this legislation to establish necessary strengthened oversight.

Under the bill, the monitors are empowered under certain circumstances to override board actions including proposed or adopted resolutions or motions by the board, or propose a resolution to the board. The monitors can overturn these decisions or failure to act if found to be a violation of state law or regulations or is inconsistent with the district's long term

strategic academic and fiscal improvement plan.

In addition, the legislation ensures that the monitors will have better and timely access to all documents and records by requiring the district to respond to requests within 48 hours. Additionally, the monitors will be given advance notice of board meeting materials. The board clerk will be required to provide copies of all proposed resolutions and board motions that will be taken up at the next meeting at least 72 hours in advance. Lastly, it also creates a new Community Advisory Board made up of residents of the district. The Community Advisory Board, comprised of ten members, would provide input to the monitors.

The need to strengthen oversight has been made clear by events of the past several years. In 2020, the NAACP and NY Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) sued the district for voting rights act violations and won. A Federal District Court Judge and the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals confirmed in great detail discrimination against the minority public school community, including a finding by Judge Cathy Seibel that “the record is replete with evidence that the private-school run Board was chronically unresponsive to the public-school community.”

The district was also woefully unprepared when officials did not order Chromebooks in a timely manner, leaving many students without the necessary technology for remote learning during the pandemic. A recent NYS Comptroller audit revealed financial mismanagement that caused a nearly \$30 million deficit that would have been catastrophic if not for federal aid and emergency borrowing.

“I’ve spent my career fighting for the students of East Ramapo and today is a monumentally victorious day in the fight for educational equity. Passing this bill establishes the meaningful oversight that has been needed in this district for years. I’m thankful to everyone that stood alongside me to make this a reality; to the advocates, parents, NAACP, NYCLU, my colleague Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and former colleagues Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee and

Senator David Carlucci that helped get us where we are today. This is truly a community win and I am honored to stand up for the students of East Ramapo - providing the protection and oversight that students and parents in this district have deserved for far too long," said **Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski**.

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*"Today is a historic moment for justice and civil rights, as New York State has reaffirmed our commitment to providing a strong public school education to all who want it, and to guarantee that the education they receive will set them on the path to a bright future. Guaranteeing effective state oversight of the district is imperative at a time when the district will soon receive over \$200 million from the federal and state government in order to ensure appropriate financial planning is undertaken to ensure all students receive the education they deserve. Thank you to Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski for his leadership on this issue, to the NAACP and NYCLU, and of course the countless parents, students, and families who have spent years fighting for this bill. This is your victory!" said **Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick**.*

"This legislation provides a needed and thoughtful step in the right direction for East Ramapo schools and, most importantly, for students. Despite years-long efforts by State Monitors, the district continues to have significant governance and long-term fiscal issues. Increasing powers for those Monitors will help to bring equity in education for all students. I'm grateful for the efforts of Senator Reichlin-Melnick and Assemblyman Zebrowski to pass this important legislation and realize that much work remains to see that all children in the district have the resources they need, and deserve, to be successful. I am committed to continuing this work for the students of East Ramapo," said **Commissioner Betty A. Rosa**.

"The Board of Regents has made it a guiding principle to view everything we do through an equity and inclusion lens and to make the necessary changes to lift up all students. There can be no equity without excellence and East Ramapo's schools have suffered for far too long from academic issues, financial mismanagement and the lack of needed supports and

services to all students. I am heartened that this legislation will allow the State Monitors and the State Education Department further capacity in their work to put an end to inequities in and to lift up the students of East Ramapo,” said **Chancellor Lester W. Young, Jr.**

“The decision to broaden the powers of our State Monitors, giving them more oversight of school board and district decisions, will help address the needs of children in the district's public schools. We cannot allow the hard-won academic progress that has been made to be placed at risk by financial mismanagement or governance issues. I know I speak for my colleagues on the Board of Regents when I say that ensuring the equitable education of the children in East Ramapo—indeed, of all children in New York—is our priority,” said **Regent Frances Wills.**

“On behalf of the members of the Spring Valley NAACP, I wish to express appreciation to East Ramapo alumni, the New York Civil Liberties Union, Rockland Clergy for Social Justice, Dr. Hazel N. Dukes, (President, NY State Conference NAACP); and above all, Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski and Senator Elijah Reichlin Melnick for their unwavering support of East Ramapo’s public school children,” said **Willie Trotman, President, Spring Valley NAACP.**

“The East Ramapo school district is a nationally-acknowledged affront to fairness and equity in education. The white majority that has controlled the school district for over a decade has brought Jim Crow into 21st century into New York – barely two hours from Albany. Black and Latinx public school students deserve a monitor who has more than a front row seat to over a decade of discrimination, mismanagement, and dismantling of a once premier school district. It is time for a state monitor that can take action and intervene for the sake of public school students’ education and futures State officials can no longer look away. East Ramapo needs a state monitor with teeth, one that will have the power to obtain School Board proposed resolutions in advance, establish a conflict of interest policy, and take action to protect the rights of public students who are almost entirely Black and Latinx from a white

majority that has demonstrated time and time again that they have no interest in their education. Governor Cuomo must sign this legislation and ensure students of color aren't cheated out of the quality education to which they are entitled," said **Donna Lieberman, Executive Director of the NYCLU**.

The bill now awaits the Governor's signature and if enacted, would remain in effect for four years, until June 30, 2025.

RELATED LEGISLATION

2021-S6052B

- 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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Relates to the powers and duties of monitors in the East Ramapo central school district

March 31, 2021

Signed by Governor

Sponsored by **Elijah Reichlin-Melnick**

Do you support this bill?