



THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE
48TH DISTRICT
OSWEGO, JEFFERSON, ST. LAWRENCE COUNTIES

December 28, 2011

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

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MEMBER
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON
RURAL RESOURCES

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Working together over the past 12 months, we've made remarkable strides towards getting New York back on the right track, by cutting spending and reining in runaway property and other taxes, and taking steps to restore the public's confidence in their government.

As we look forward to the New Year, we can expect many new challenges, and we stand ready to assist you in continuing the progress we made to create a better future for our state and its people.

One such challenge involves the fair distribution of state aid to our public schools. We were pleased to partner with you in committing to a significant increase in state education aid in the coming fiscal year. While all schools can and will benefit from this increased funding, we would like to call your attention to the unique needs of the low-wealth, rural schools that we represent.

These rural school districts are confronted with a number of factors that make it increasingly difficult to meet their obligation to provide the quality education that students deserve and taxpayers expect.

A thinning tax base and low wealth make it difficult for rural schools to fund these needs on their own. In the 48th Senate District, for example, the average combined wealth ratio is just .501—half the state average. These schools are forced to increasingly rely on state aid to meet the basic educational requirements of students in their care.

Consequently, reductions in aid disproportionately impact these districts. While wealthier districts debate whether to curtail one of a multitude of foreign language offerings, arts or extracurricular activities, our schools struggle mightily to meet basic educational needs.

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Additionally, existing school funding formulas fail to adequately account for the true financial condition of our rural schools. The existing formula is based on a scale that treats the poorest districts equally with districts whose residents have twice the income. The result is an unequal educational experience for students in our regions of the state and is an issue that the Board of Regents recently pointed out.

One solution is to economize, streamline and reduce costs—goals we all share, but recognize they cannot be achieved overnight. Rural schools need direct action now in order for them to continue to provide the quality education that our students deserve, and taxpayers should expect.

As you prepare your Executive Budget for the coming year, we urge you to consider the plight of our rural schools, and to present to us a plan that recognizes both the sacrifices they have made, and the unique challenges that they continue to face.

We look forward to working with you to enact a budget that meets the needs of our students across the state, including in our rural school districts.

Sincerely,



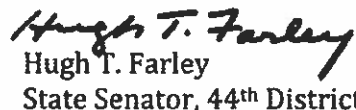
Patricia A. Ritchie
State Senator, 48th District



Thomas W. Libous
State Senator, 52nd District



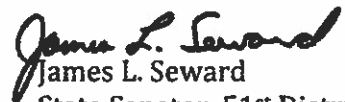
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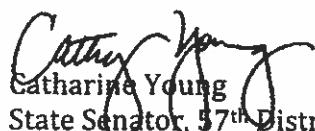
James L. Seward
State Senator, 51st District



John J. Bonacic
State Senator, 42nd District




Betty Little
State Senator, 45th District




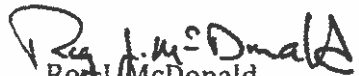
Catharine Young
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State Senator, 61st District


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State Senator, 53rd District


Patrick M. Gallivan
State Senator, 59th District

CC: Senator Dean Skelos, President Pro Tempore
David Wakelyn, Deputy Secretary for Education
Lisa Timoney, Chief of School Aid and Education