

NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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9TH SENATE DISTRICT



## **We must prioritize school foundation aid**

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The proposed reduction in foundation aid to numerous school districts across the state in Gov. Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget is profoundly disappointing, and should concern every parent, teacher and child who values the future of our state.

While the overall budget is fiscally conservative, what is most troubling is that Hochul has clearly stated that the self-created migrant crisis — which is a direct result of our open-border policies and New York's sanctuary status — deserves more tax dollars than our children. The governor has allocated \$2.4 billion to continue funding illegal migrants in addition to the \$1.9 billion that was in last year's budget, all of which does nothing to fix the root of the problem.

School districts in my Senate District 9 are facing a potential reduction of \$11 million in foundation aid, which has been sprung on every district with no warning or time to plan. This alarming yet pervasive trend of misplaced priorities and backward policymaking has persisted in New York state for quite some time: Under one-party rule, criminals are excused for their criminality and victims are ignored; law-abiding citizens pay their taxes dutifully, only to be hit with more taxes, fees and tolls; and now, in line with this disturbing way of thinking, Hochul is seeking to take taxpayer money — our money — away from our kids. These children are legal residents of this nation whose parents contribute to our state's economic health. To bypass their needs in favor of providing money and resources to combat an illegal-migrant crisis that has no end in sight is simply outrageous.

The 9th District is home to hardworking taxpayers who are now facing some of the most significant cuts in Nassau County. The Long Beach School District, where three in 10 students live below the poverty line, would lose \$4.3 million for its operating expenses under Hochul's proposal. To make up for this loss, the district will have to do more than just lay off teachers and cut after-school programs: It may have to close one of its grammar schools. The Lawrence school district faces the most significant cut, a nearly 40 percent reduction in foundation aid funding.

In Nassau or elsewhere in the state, the success of local school districts is often the first bellwether of the success of a community and its desirability for prospective homeowners. Stripping funding from our schools will remove

vital resources, and ultimately the school districts will have to increase taxes if they want to maintain the level of services they offer, which will in turn lower property values.

This seems to be in stark contrast to the governor's goal of building more housing on Long Island — no one will want to move into a neighborhood if the schools are underfunded and their enrollment is declining. I'm not certain that Hochul understands that these cuts will ultimately contribute to the population loss in our state.

These reductions will have dire consequences for students, educators and taxpayers, necessitating layoffs of teachers and support staff, which will compromise the quality of education. Increased class sizes will diminish the quality of instruction and reduce individual attention for students. Cuts, or the elimination of academic programs and extracurricular activities, will deprive them of well-rounded educational opportunities and necessary enrichment experiences.

Here at home, even school districts that won't see cuts are standing in solidarity with their fellow districts and their superintendents. I hosted a news conference last Thursday with the intent of putting pressure on the governor to reverse these devastating cuts, and more than 40 superintendents, Board of Education members, parents and students from districts all over Nassau County gathered to voice their opposition.

It's time to re-evaluate our state's budget priorities, because the allocation of significant funds to address the migrant crisis while local schools face funding reductions highlights backward priorities and policy failures.

Inadequate investment in education will have devastating long-term consequences for economic competitiveness and social well-being. The cuts Hochul is planning will widen achievement gaps, disproportionately affecting low-income students and burdening families with additional financial responsibilities. I will continue to advocate for a budget that restores education funding for New York's future prosperity and to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

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