



BILLY JONES
Assemblyman 115th District

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ALBANY

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September 5th, 2024

Rockefeller Institute of Government
411 State St.
Albany, NY 12203

To Whom It May Concern:

As the representative of the 115th Assembly District, which includes all of Clinton and Franklin Counties as well as the northwestern part of Essex County, I believe that we need to examine how the state pays for education through the foundation aid formula. Too often, rural school districts like many of the ones in my region struggle to make ends meet due to the current formula and it is important to consider all school districts, including ones in rural Upstate New York, while considering the foundation aid formula.

Put simply, someone's zip code should not determine the quality of education they will receive. However, this happens too often in rural upstate communities. One factor that impacts access to education is the size of the school districts. Smaller districts do not have the means to provide as many advanced classes, electives, athletics, music and arts programs as larger districts, leading to questions of equity across New York State. Another factor impacting access to education is property values. Since many of my school districts are located in the Adirondacks or along Lake Champlain, this has caused higher property values in many of my districts while their student population socio-economic levels remain low. Since property levels play such an important role in the current formula, this negatively impacts aid that these school districts receive.

To make sure that all New York students have access to the education they deserve, we must update data used for the foundation aid formula so that it is accurate. Due to universal free lunches, Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) data is no longer accurate because there is no longer an incentive to complete the paperwork. We must use other means such as Census data or ALICE data from the United Way to provide a more accurate picture of the socio-economic status of these school districts. District reserves and foundation aid also need to be separate so that school districts are better equipped to educate their students. Any necessary changes to hold harmless must also be phased in gradually.

Schools are not the same as they were a decade ago. The formula needs to reflect how much we spend per pupil to better represent the actual costs of education. Overall, since the foundation formula was last addressed, schools are asked to do more and are required to service the whole child. This includes mental health services, meeting emotional and social needs, disability services, ESL programs, and addressing student's socio-economic needs. Schools are no longer just places for kids to learn- they now provide the community support students need as they mature. This is causing costs for higher needs students to skyrocket, leaving many school districts without the means to best support their students. We need to take all

of these factors into account while addressing the foundation aid formula.

Students in rural upstate communities deserve the same education opportunities as their peers downstate. Examining the foundation formula to make sure that students in my district are not left behind is imperative for our state's future. Please reach out to me at my office if you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Billy Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "J".

D. Billy Jones
Member of Assembly