



NEW JERSEY SENATE

JOE PENNACCHIO

SENATOR, 26TH DISTRICT

170 CHANGEBRIDGE ROAD, UNIT A1

MONTVILLE, NEW JERSEY 07045

TEL: (973) 227-4012

FAX: (973) 227-4945

SenPennacchio@njleg.org

SENATE REPUBLICAN WHIP

SENATE ECONOMIC GROWTH COMMITTEE

SENATE MILITARY AND VETERAN'S

AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

February 26, 2021

The Honorable Philip D. Murphy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

As a legislative representative of West Milford and Jefferson Township, I am deeply concerned about your Fiscal Year 2022 budget proposal, specifically the cuts in school funding aid to West Milford and Jefferson Township, two districts that are once again being short-changed by our state's inadequate school funding formula.

Under your proposal, West Milford stands to lose nearly \$2.5 million dollars. This is in addition to the \$1,972,723 cut in last year's budget, and the \$950,066 cut in the FY20 budget. In total, West Milford will see a reduction in school aid of close to 40 percent! More than \$5 million - over three years!

Similarly, Jefferson is set to lose \$2,791,524 of school funding aide in the FY22 budget. This is on top of a \$1,193,302 cut in FY20 and a \$2,251,742 in FY21, bringing their three-year reduction to more than \$6 million, or close to 35 percent over three years!

As you know, because of Highlands' restrictions and the vitally important property tax cap, these towns have nowhere else to turn when their aid is cut like this, which will inevitably lead to widespread teacher layoffs, and a reduction in resources for our children.

The Highlands restrictions have made these two towns virtual wards of the state. The Highlands Act was mandated by the state, but Trenton has never stepped up, acknowledged, and addressed the hardships it caused. Because of the Act, it is impossible for ratable growth to keep pace with the state's reductions in school funding.

The geographic size of West Milford and Jefferson Township makes school consolidation impractical. Children would be forced to spend hours each day in buses to reach their destinations.

A major flaw in the formula is the lack of acknowledgement and remediation for districts such as West Milford and Jefferson Township, whose ratable policies are controlled by the state.

I ask you, out of a sense of justice and fairness, to immediately address this issue, reinstate these draconian cuts, and work with the legislature to fix this inequitable formula.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Pennacchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Senator Joe Pennacchio
Senate Republican Whip

cc: Senate President Sweeney
Senator Paul Sarlo
Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan, Ed. D.
Mayor Eric Wilsusen
Mayor Michele Dale