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NEW YORK STATE
LEGISLATURE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 26, 2019

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*****Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre, Senators Brooks and Boyle hold joint press conference regarding Wyandanch School District*****

Amid budget woes, state lawmakers announce passage of legislation establishing fiscal monitor to oversee school district.

Wyandanch, NY—New York State Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Senator John Brooks, and Senator Phil Boyle today announced passage of legislation authorizing the State Commissioner of Education to appoint a monitor to oversee the Wyandanch Union Free School District. The legislation follows two consecutive failed budget votes that sought to levy school taxes by 40.9% and 20%, respectively. The state lawmakers held a press conference on Wednesday morning with parents, alumni and community leaders in front of the Wyandanch School administration building. Babylon Town Councilwoman Jackie Gordon and a representative from Suffolk County Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory's office were also in attendance.

“Wyandanch schoolchildren have been shortchanged for far too long, and while there is no doubt that this school district does not get its fair share of funding, we also need to ensure that every dollar coming into this district is being spent in the right places,” said Jean-Pierre (D-Wheatley Heights). “The appointment of a fiscal monitor to oversee and weigh in on the day-to-day business operations of this school district is necessary to help ensure that we are doing right by the students, parents and taxpayers of the Wyandanch community.”

Following the two failed budget votes, the district adopted a contingency budget for the 2019-20 school year which will result in the elimination of kindergarten and prekindergarten programs, afterschool programs, all sports and athletic programs, summer bridge programs, fine arts and mentor teacher programs, among other critical services.

“In my opinion, the Wyandanch school district does not have the skillset—at both the administrative and school board levels—to manage its way through the current financial crisis,” said Senator Brooks (D-Seaford). “I believe the best thing to do at this time is to appoint a monitor, enter into shared service agreements with some of the local school districts, BOCES and local governments, and make sure the Wyandanch school district is ready to open come September. The objective of our efforts is to provide the tools the district needs to get back on track and turn things around, and to ensure that the best interests of the student body and the community as a whole are taken into account.”

“The passage of bipartisan legislation creating a monitor for the Wyandanch school district is not a step we took lightly,” said Senator Boyle (R-Bay Shore). “Our most important concern was, and continues to be, for the students of Wyandanch.”

The legislation (A.8422A/S.6588A) would authorize the Education Commissioner to appoint a monitor to provide direct oversight of the fiscal policies, practices, programs and decisions of the school district, board of education and the superintendent. The monitor would be a non-voting ex-officio member of the school board with experience in school district finances, and would serve a term expiring at the end of the June 2024 school year.

“I want to thank my colleagues in state government for identifying and recognizing that this school district needs help so that it can best meet the needs of our schoolchildren,” said Councilwoman Gordon. “The appointment of a fiscal monitor will ensure that Wyandanch is responsibly carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities so that it can obtain the proper funding that our children need.”

“Our Wyandanch schoolchildren are flourishing and our community is resilient, but we need the oversight of a fiscal monitor to overcome these issues so that our children receive the fair share of what they need to succeed,” said Tanya Crawford-Bryant, who graduated from Wyandanch High School in 1986 and currently has three grandchildren attending Wyandanch schools.

In August 2018, the Office of the New York State Comptroller released the findings of an audit that was conducted on Wyandanch during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years which revealed several concerns, including that district officials did not use competitive methods to bid for professional services, did not abide by federal per diem guidelines for school official reimbursement and incurred unnecessary costs during travel periods. Four months later, the State Education Department issued a letter to the Wyandanch School Board expressing “serious concerns” regarding the fiscal condition of the district. In March 2019, the Office of the New York State Comptroller completed a review of the general fund budgets for the Wyandanch School District for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years and found that the district consistently overestimated revenues and underestimated expenses.

The legislation is pending approval by Governor Cuomo, who will need to sign the bill into law in order for it to become effective.

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