

Middle Country Central School District Students

March 22, 2024

Dear Honorable Senator Anthony H. Palumbo, Senator Dean Murray, Congressman Nicholas J. LaLota, Assemblyman Douglas Smith, Assemblyman Edward A. Flood and Assemblyman Joseph DeStefano,

We are writing to you on behalf of many high school students enrolled in the Middle Country Central School District to address the Governor's proposed budget plan for the upcoming 2024-25 school year. We reside in US Congressional District 1 in Suffolk County and are primarily composed of the towns of Selden and Centereach, as well as parts of Lake Grove, Coram, Lake Ronkonkoma, Port Jefferson Station, and Farmingville.

We are aware of your stance on the elimination of the "hold harmless" policy and your support of a state aid increase for school districts. We thank you for your efforts to reinstate it and stop the passing of this proposed budget. At the same time, we mailed this letter to you, we also mailed a letter to Governor Hochul with signed signature pages. We are sure you have received similar sentiments from our neighboring districts in similar circumstances. We ask that you please make our concerns known to the Governor as you continue to fight for us. While we cannot speak to the situation in our neighboring districts, we can assure you of ours. The following was also stated in our letter to Governor Hochul.

The limited increase in Foundation Aid included in the Governor's proposed budget will certainly harm the children of our district. The goal of targeted slashing of districts that have excess reserves has mistakenly hit us, a district that for the past several years has been obliged to dip into our reserves to balance the budget, primarily because of inadequate school aid. Our reserves are almost gone now, and if the current proposed budget is implemented, we will have a \$7.5 million gap in our budget next year.

We are not a wealthy district; we are not even an average wealth district. The median income of our district was \$42,475 as of 2020 and the costs of living have only gone up. Our tax levy cap is too low to overcome your remaking of the state Foundation Aid formula, which gives the illusion of a wealthier Middle Country.

At the high school level, of which there are about 3,000 students enrolled in our two high schools, we are facing the loss of over 20 classes, including the elimination of Psychology as a whole (both AP and basic), lab period for Regents level Geometry and Algebra 1, and five music classes. It is affecting the creative-minded and STEM-interested students alike. The elimination of labs for our Regents math classes will only lower the passing rates on our Regents exams. This recalculating of Foundation Aid goes deeper than numbers on a page, it will diminish the passions of Middle Country students.

Just last month as this budget was announced, our guidance department had to reschedule appointments for students to pick their classes for the next year because of the cuts that have shortened our roster of available classes. Imagine being a student looking forward to taking Child Development, purely because you get to take care of a robot baby for a week, and having that ripped away from you. These students, by the way, want to learn about teaching careers. It's those small opportunities within a class that keep some kids coming to school when they find the rest of their day a drag. We are being denied these opportunities.

Thank you for your efforts and your continued support. Please make our specific concerns known to the Governor.

Sincerely,  
Middle Country Students