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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Long Island Delegation to the NYS Senate
Members of the Long Island Delegation to the NYS Assembly

FROM: Dr. Julie Davis Lutz, Legislative Co-Chair
Dr. Walter F. Schartner, Legislative Co-Chair

DATE: October 15, 2014

RE: Unaccompanied Minors in the Nation

New York State has been experiencing what is acknowledged to be the second largest influx of unaccompanied minors in the nation. Many of these youngsters are middle school and high school age, most with little or no formal schooling, and little or no English language skills. The majority of these minors are located in school districts that already enroll a large immigrant, often transient, population.

New York's public schools honor their responsibility to treat these students equitably, and provide the free appropriate public education to which they are entitled by law. Several challenges inhibiting our ability to do that include increases to enrollment, facilities, accommodations, services, and staffing. Compounding the situation are the limitations placed on schools by New York's property levy cap and a state law that fails to promptly recognize increases in enrollment.

Aside from the financial issues, the educational challenges presented by many of these students are significant. Many have had little to no formal education although they are similar in age to students in this country who are preparing to exit the educational system. Providing the necessary training for these individuals to be independent upon leaving school in a much shorter time frame requires some flexibility. Intensive English language training, career training, and basic skill development are crucial. In light of this, consideration should be given to flexibility in traditional high school pathways for the older students who are arriving. Flexibility is also needed regarding regulations that have these high-needs students of all ages negatively impacting school district assessments and rankings.

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There is an immediate and compelling need for the federal and state government and their respective education departments to respond with support for both the fiscal and regulatory flexibility that is needed. This is a societal and governmental issue with potential long-term impact on both the schools and the communities they serve.

We would be happy to discuss the needs with you in greater detail.

JDL/WFS/jc

This memo was mailed and emailed to:

Senator Philip Boyle
Senator John Flanagan
Senator Kemp Hannon
Senator Kenneth LaValle
Senator Carl Marcellino
Senator Jack Martins
Senator Dean Skelos
Senator Lee Zeldin
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Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel
Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages
Assemblyman Robert Sweeney
Assemblyman Fred Thiele
Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg

**Mailed and faxed; not emailed*