

June 7, 2023

GOPAL AND COUGHLIN ANNOUNCE BI-PARTISAN LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT FUNDING INCLUDING FREEHOLD REGIONAL

Senator Declan O'Scanlon of Monmouth County will co-sponsor key legislation

OCEAN TOWNSHIP – Senate Education Chair Vin Gopal (D-Monmouth) and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin have announced legislation that they will move immediately to stop funding cuts at regional school districts. The legislation will also encourage smaller school districts who are facing cuts due to declining enrollment to go towards regionalization and adding shared services.

“Freehold Regional is a model school district. We need to encourage more districts to go towards regionalization and shared services the way Freehold Regional is. This bill will help achieve that. In addition, this will allow Freehold Regional to continue to offer courtesy busing for students,” stated Gopal

The legislation will freeze cuts due to declining enrollment for those regional districts who have the following:

- 5 or more towns that has demonstrated it has mitigated the costs of regionalization
- Spends at least 15% less in administrative costs than the statewide average for regional school districts
- Has increased its tax levy by maximum amount allowed by law in each of the last five years

“Many school districts have made a decision in their communities to consolidate districts in order to provide excellent educational opportunities while lowering costs. When it comes to state aid, we shouldn't penalize those districts for working hard to keeping costs down and property taxes lower,” stated Coughlin

The bill has earned bi-partisan support with the sponsorship from Senate Republican Budget Officer Declan O'Scanlon, who represents part of Freehold Regional in the Senate.

In 2021, Gopal and O'Scanlon partnered to pass comprehensive legislation aimed at eliminating barriers to school regionalization and creating financial incentives for districts that pursued regionalization. Freehold Regional, O'Scanlon noted, has already achieved the outcome that far-reaching law was designed to produce.

“Freehold Regional is a model district. This legislation is the start of what we need to ultimately do - stop cuts from S2 and establish a new school funding formula. But this legislation here today will allow Freehold Regional to stop funding cuts even if their enrollment goes down, which is key to making sure one of the most successful regional school districts in the state is allowed to grow and prosper,” stated O'Scanlon.

Freehold Regional Schools Superintendent Chuck Sampson, who met with legislators to advocate for a solution, applauded the legislation.

“We have faced significant cuts because of S2. This bi-partisan legislation is a game changer for Freehold Regional and for other school districts that want to move towards regionalization. I strongly urge every legislator to support the Gopal/Coughlin bill. I want to personally thank Senator Gopal and Senator O’Scanlon for their tireless efforts on behalf of the Freehold Regional Community. They have been constant sources of collaboration as we navigated the funding issues created under S2. We are grateful for their support. Many thanks also to Speaker Coughlin for introducing the legislation.” stated Sampson

Marlboro Mayor Jon Hornik and Freehold Borough Mayor Kevin Kane, who both worked with legislators on creating the legislation, applauded it

“This legislation is important for the residents of Marlboro Township. This will also allow Freehold Regional to continue courtesy busing for more than 3,000 students in the district. I applaud the sponsors of the bill - Senators Gopal and O’Scanlon, and Speaker Coughlin for introducing this important piece of legislation,” stated Hornik

“Freehold Regional is a model school district. We should be encouraging districts like that to happen - not stopping it - regardless of enrollment, when they are doing everything else right. Thank you to the sponsors for moving this important bill for Freehold Borough’s families,” stated Kane.

The bill will prevent further cuts to Freehold Regional for the coming school year and the 2024-2025 school year, after which the S-2’s adjustments to New Jersey’s school funding formula will end.

The Assembly version of the bill, A5575, will be voted on by the Assembly Education Committee Thursday.

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