



Town of Smithfield

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RANDY R. ROSSI, MBA, CGFM
TOWN MANAGER

February 17, 2022

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: FY 2023 Education Aid (H1723 – Various Articles);
H7123, Article 16 – Municipal and Higher Ed Matching Grant Program**

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the Committee on Finance,

The Town of Smithfield supports the Governor's commitment to steady education funding by maintaining education funding formula aid in FY2023 to local educational agencies and categorical aid for communities throughout Rhode Island. We appreciate the General Assembly's commitment to phasing in the school funding formula for the last 11 years. The funding formula created a predicable methodology that has increased state aid to education, improved student outcomes and slowed property tax growth.

While these are important investments, we know that annual funding for categorical programs is not sufficient to meet all the needs of our students. Municipal officials have specifically noted the need for additional funding for special education and transportation, which have not been funded at appropriate levels.

We continue to ask that the General Assembly provide relief to school districts experiencing enrollment and Free/Reduced-Price lunch program fluctuation. The approved FY 2022 budget made accommodations to address education funding shortfalls driven by fluctuations in enrollment and Free/Reduced-Price lunch as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the FY 2023 proposed budget, the Governor allocates \$49.7 million to a Transition Fund which will ensure that no local education agency will receive a reduction in aid compared to FY 2022. As we are still in the midst of a transition from a pandemic to an endemic, enrollment around the state continues to fluctuate, we ask for similar accommodations are made in the FY 2023 budget to smooth any decreases to communities.

School Construction Bond

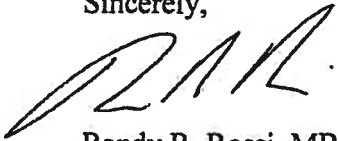
Many Rhode Island communities have benefited from the \$250 million bond that was approved by voters in 2018, as documented in the School Building Authority Report "Renewing the Dream" released earlier this week. Here in Smithfield, we have utilized \$3,496,929 pay-as-you-go bond offerings as of January 2022, optimizing our reimbursements through temporary bonuses. Advancing additional pay-as-you-go funding and housing aid in combination with extending temporary bonuses will benefit all communities.

Municipal and Higher Ed Matching Grant Program

We support the FY 2023 budget proposal that would leverage the State's federal funds with our municipal federal funds to maximize the impact of these investments. With the additional allocation of \$46.7 million available as a matching fund for cities and towns, communities like Smithfield will be able to expand their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) investments. These additional funds will support opportunities to renovate or build a community wellness center to support out-of-school learning opportunities, workforce development and improve health outcomes for their residents.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



Randy R. Rossi, MBA, CGFM
Town Manager
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