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New York State

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Testimony of

New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers (NYS Parent Teacher Association)

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I am Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, the Executive Director of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA), and am proud to represent nearly 300,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents of 2.6 million New York school children.

NYS PTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Executive Budget and how it impacts children and families statewide.

Thank you to Assembly Education Chairwoman Catherine Nolan, Senate Education Chair Carl Marcellino and other members of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees for your interest and attendance today. Your dedicated work on behalf of our students and children should be commended and we thank you for your continued commitment to our schools.

New York schools share amazing successes. New York has more students taking advanced placement examinations and more Intel Science awards winners than most all states; our students excel in our career and technical education programs; they perform and create amazing works in our arts programs.

However, our challenges are real too. While some school districts have declining enrollment, more than 200 districts show enrollment growth with limited funds. More than 50 percent of our students in New York now live in some level of poverty, qualifying for free or reduced priced lunch. Many students have special learning or education needs. Our schools welcome English Language Learners (ELL), some with interrupted formal education, some as unaccompanied minors. More than 100,000 students are homeless or living in temporary housing.

And despite these challenges, our schools continue to do more with less, trying each day to move every child on a pathway to good citizenship and graduation. The need to provide students and schools with resources, programs and services has never been more important, especially when districts are stressed to provide a quality education where federal and state funds are insufficient and the tax cap is binding.

EDUCATION ISSUES

School Aid

State Aid as allocated in the Executive Budget proposal is at least $1 billion short of need, especially while shifting dollars away from Foundation Aid to grant based programs, which are locally unsustainable.

While the 2017-18 Executive Budget allocation of $428 million as an increase in Foundation Aid, $333 million for expenses based aid and $150 million in unallocated school aid through the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, is a good starting point for negotiations, we are concerned that this is short of the $2.0 billion school aid increase called for by NYS PTA.

The Executive Budget school aid allocation generally includes an increase of $1.0 billion:

- $428 million as an increase in Foundation Aid, with a $50 million community schools set-aside within the Foundation Aid increase
- $333 million for expense based aids, which represent full funding of expense based aids
- $150 million for a "Fiscal Stabilization Fund"
- $35 million for the "Empire State After-School Program"
- $5 million to expand pre-kindergarten for three and four-year olds
- $5.3 million to expand Early College High Schools

- $5 million in other education initiatives
- $22 million for Charter School Tuition Reimbursement

NYS PTA has called for a school aid increase of $2.0 billion, to include:

- $1.5 billion to continue current school services; and
- $500 million to address priorities including support for struggling schools, support for English Language Learners, expansion of college and career pathways and support for Career and Technical Education programs, expansion of pre-kindergarten for both three and four year-olds, teacher professional development, and support for school districts with growing enrollment.

On Foundation Aid

- We are greatly concerned that changes to the Foundation Aid and school aid formulas in the Executive Budget eliminates the predictability necessary to plan for future school aid calculations;
- We do not support the proposal to use the previous year's Foundation Aid amount as a base, especially because it does not include the previous fiscal shortfalls;
- NYS PTA strongly supports a commitment to fully phase in the previously promised Foundation Aid of more than $4 billion over the next three years;
- We do support a revision of the formula weights related to poverty, disabilities, English Language Learners, enrollment growth and geographic sparseness. Some, but not all, of these revisions were partly addressed in the Executive Budget;
- We also urge a new study to determine the actual cost of providing each student with an opportunity for success and preparation for the future based on all current conditions and regulations.

We continue to support after-school, Early College High School, pre-kindergarten, and community schools. However, most districts need more overall support to properly initiate these programs after managing under the Gap Elimination Adjustment, shortfalls in Foundation Aid and low tax cap calculations over the past seven years.

Tax Cap Reforms Needed

For the past two years, the tax cap for school districts has been devastatingly low, 0.12 percent and 1.2 percent.

New York's schools cannot continue to sustain an artificially low tax cap coupled with the more than $4 billion still owed to schools under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Districts have been forced to make difficult budgeting choices in attempts to save programs and services for students.

NYS PTA supports common sense tax cap reform, that includes;

1. Changing the allowable levy limit to at least two percent or CPI, whichever is greater;
2. Elimination of the supermajority requirement and the possibility of negative tax levy limits;
3. Allowing for exemptions like enrollment increases; and
4. Implementation of tax cap corrections the legislature and Governor have already approved including: excluding BOCES capital expenses from calculations and including Payments in Lieu of Taxes in growth factor determinations.

English Language Learners and their families
New York State has long been the gateway for immigrant success; the door to the American Dream. Our economic and social success relies on an educated, globally aware citizenry, prepared to address the issues of an ever-changing world.

We need to continue to build the success of our diverse community through investments and support for our key resource - our children.

Adequately supporting ELL students and their families to reach our educational goals in a timely manner continues to be a challenge for many districts and communities, as they try to provide increased services and supports for all students while juggling limited state resources and bound by a tax levy limit that has been devastatingly low for the past few years.

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget fails to propose targeted program funding for ELL students and their families, especially considering the number of students entering our education system and the increased ELL curriculum and policy demands.

At PTA, we speak for every child and family, with one voice, and strive for collaborative conversations to develop solutions. We ask that you consider:

1. Additional dedicated funding for ELL students within the state budget with an increased focus on supports for school districts experiencing high density populations of diverse language speakers;
2. Improved current aid to address mid-year influxes of unaccompanied minor students and for districts with high unaccompanied minor populations;
3. Fiscal support for and examination of Part 154 implementation and requirements;
4. Accelerated teacher training for all educators in supporting ELL students and their families, along with expedited certification of bilingual and TSOL educators;
5. Implementation of the Office of Family Engagement, with staff dedicated to enhanced research based supports for families of ELL students along with developing resources and supports for community collaboration with dedicated family engagement activities in diverse communities; and
6. Expanded state capacity to provide translation and interpretation services, for key parent documents and other materials, to minimize local district impact.

Funding for Family Engagement
There is nothing more important to a child's education than parents and families who are key partners in the learning process. Parent and family engagement and involvement is a key indicator for success of a child and thankfully, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates state supported parental involvement in education.

Under ESSA, school districts must have a family engagement policy written in conjunction with parents and hold an annual meeting with families. Our research and experience show that parents continue to need support in understanding data, accountability measures, curriculum and learning strategies that are systemic and related to their child.

Parents must be supported in providing children exposure to literacy, STEM, Arts, CTE experiences, job and career pathways, and learning experiences that may not be readily available in their community or local schools.

NYS PTA strongly supports continued investments in services, programs and policies that lea to effective family engagement in our schools and communities.

Last year's budget included funds for the Office of Family Engagement at the State Education Department. We seek continuation of these funds and ask for quick approval of funding for the remaining staff positions critical to that office. We have been concerned that funding authorization and disbursements for this office and programs have been slow to be realized, therefore impeding this most essential work.

We look forward to partnering with the state to see that all parents and families are supported.

Support for Community Schools
Community Schools are an effective strategy for student and family success which require real relationships between schools, community and stakeholders. Community Schools often address the health, social capital, and socio-emotional needs of students and their families. We all know access to health care, crisis intervention and continuous support of those in need help free children to increase attention and attendance at school, build academic and life skills through the services provided in the Community Schools model.

Yet, for Community Schools to be a successful strategy for student and family success, they require real relationships and strategic planning by families, school leaders and staff, community service providers and stakeholders. Planning time, data gathering, and strategic planning are necessary before engaging in this model. All require an infusion of resources for success.

With fully phased-in Foundation Aid, more schools would be able to leverage resources to consider converting to a Community School. Consistent funding streams are more beneficial than one-shots or grant funding which can often not be sustained locally.

While there is a $50 million set aside included in the Foundation Aid increase, we support increases in total Foundation Aid, alongside specific targeted aid for our state's struggling schools.

We request sustained funding for allocations for struggling and persistently struggling schools.

We continue to be concerned about the punitive nature of the current receivership model. While school turnaround is necessary in some cases, schools and educators must be given ample time for meaningful change to support students and learning. Community Schools may take five to seven years to become well established and experience growth in student success.

NYS PTA previously advocated for a revision of the timeline allowable for school turnaround before a school is eligible to be turned over to an external receiver. Further, receivership schools and districts are owed a significant portion of the more than $4 billion in past Foundation Aid. Consistent, reliable state support for instruction, capital and transportation needs are critical for creation of a successful Community School.

However, ALL schools should be afforded the opportunity to transform schools into community hubs for learning and family support and funding for any school to support this model should be included in the final State Budget.

After School Care
Many families cannot afford after school care and some children are unfortunately left unsupervised or under-supervised. According to research, nearly a half-million school age children in New York are without a safe and/or educational after-school programs.

NYS PTA supports the $35 million allocation to fund the Empire State After-School Program to create approximately 22,000 after school seats in the 16 Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative Areas. Access to

low cost or free high quality (preferable school-based) after school care for children is critical and must be supported and expanded.

We also note that while the concentration of students without childcare or supervision may be in these 16 Initiative Areas, support is needed across the state for safe, educational after-school care, where student need is evident but may be less dense.

Pre-Kindergarten
High quality free and low-cost pre-kindergarten for both three and four-year old children is critically important.

All children should have complete and equal access to high-quality pre-school educational opportunities. Parents and families play in integral role in pre-school education and high-quality programs must include attention to the unique developmental nature of the social/emotional, physical and academic experience of young children in a manner that addresses the whole child.

NYS PTA supports both the consolidation of pre-kindergarten funding programs and the $5 million increase in pre-kindergarten funding to expand programming for three and four year olds. We also support the $5 million for implementation of the QUALITYstarsNY program.

NYS PTA has called for true universal pre-kindergarten for all public school students yet recognizes that we have no mandate for full day kindergarten for all children. There are still too many school districts without full-day kindergarten. In a time of fluctuating revenues, districts may be forced to offer half day or no kindergarten if they experience fiscal distress. We must not let this occur.

Early College High Schools and Career and Technical Education
By providing predictable funding for Early College High Schools, CTE and STEM programs, New York is investing in both the economic future of our state and our children, as more than 90 percent of CTE students graduate with a Regents diploma.

Access and affordability of college is prohibitive for some families and students. Expanding opportunities in high school for advanced collegiate level learning enhances student's exposure to high level skills and advanced coursework. Students in these programs typically receive both a high school diploma and an associate degree, which propels them to success.

NYS PTA fully supports the $5.3 million increase in funding to expand Early College High Schools programs. While this expansion is specifically for schools to focus on computer science programs, we support expansion for ALL programs and courses of study for students.

New York must also expand supports for Career and Technical Education. While we are pleased there is a now a 4 and 1 pathway to graduation, much more work is needed to promote and support CTE programs and pathways to graduation.

Redefining success, if a state economic priority is building our STEM/CTE workforce readiness, then we need to address the two-decade old formula for BOCES reimbursement and incentivize district investments in these programs.

We support amending the current aid formula for both BOCES CTE programs and Special Services Aid, to provide for more fiscal support to critical CTE services. The BOCES formula hasn't been increased since 1990 and only provides aid for the first $30,000 of a BOCES educator's salary. The corresponding Special Services Aid in the Big Five city school districts also needs to be adjusted to reflect current labor figures.

STEM and Arts education, or STEAM, are based on hands-on experiences, which need to be presented in middle school and expanded through high school, with better pre-college/career counseling. We look forward to assisting this work and supporting both students, parents, families and educators in this expansion.

Charter Schools
NYS PTA appreciates the assistance to districts making payments to charters through the new tier of Charter School Transitional Aid funded at $22 million.

However, we are opposed to changes to and the weakening of rules governing NYC charter schools, especially until real meaningful charter school accountability and transparency legislation is enacted.

We fully support a parent's decision to place their child in a charter school, but continue to be concerned with the charter industry under-serving students with disabilities and English Language Learners. We are also concerned with the imbalance between funding and supports for some co-located public and charter schools. Therefore we recommend better oversight before any charter expansion is considered.

Special Education Waivers
NYS PTA opposes the proposal to allow school districts to apply for waivers from certain special education laws and regulations.

Federal and state special education requirements were enacted for sound purposes and our children must be adequately served and protected. We recommend continued federal advocacy for full funding of IDEA, or at least a better proportion than the current 16% disbursement to our state.

Advanced Placement Test Assistance
NYS PTA supports the allocation of $2 million to fund AP exam costs for 68,000 low-income students.

For many students and families, the cost of taking an AP examination is prohibitive. This proposal would begin to level the playing field and provide for appropriate assistance to low-income families to support children in their preparation for college and career.

Teacher Programs
The "T" in PTA matters to us, and professional development and acknowledgment of great teaching is critical for our educators and schools. NYS PTA supports a renewed investment in professional development, especially for our classroom teachers.

We also support the continuation of the Master Teachers Program at $2 million and support the continuation of the Empire State Excellence in Teaching Award.

Cyberbullying
Recent studies show students who experience bullying are impacted throughout their life. NYS PTA supports the $300,000 allocation to combat and prevent cyberbullying in schools, using school-based strategies, professional development for school counselors and school-based public awareness campaigns.

Locally Sourced Food in Schools
The NY PTA supports the Executive Budget allocation of $750,000 to support the Farm-to-School Grant Program budget to support up to 15 new produce purchase programs for schools.

Additionally, we appreciate the proposal to increase from $116,000 to $416,000 for the New York Agriculture in the Classroom Program.

Excelsior Scholarships
NYS PTA supports expanded access and affordability to higher education for students and families.

The Executive Budget proposes making SUNY and CUNY tuition-free for certain children from certain middle class families. Free tuition would be immediate for students of families making up to $100,000 annually, phased in over the next two years to $125,000 annually.

However, we question the hard cut off for eligibility and are concerned about the requirement that students must complete coursework in either two or four years.

SUPPORT FOR THE WHOLE CHILD

Homelessness
The Executive Budget proposed changes to remove certain children awaiting foster care from the definition of homeless.

Rights of a homeless or temporary housing student and the definition of the "school district of origin" are expanded.

The Executive Budget proposes that placement decisions of homeless or temporary housing students must be made in "the best interest" of the child.

The Executive Budget also proposes language to provide Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs added flexibility, doubles the allowable length of stay in short-term crisis programs to 120 days and extends long-term programs from 18 to 24 months. The proposal also increases the maximum age for youth in long-term programs to 24 years old.

We fully support better outreach and programs for homeless students. We also support the Executive Budget proposal to provide Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs added flexibility, and extending the length of stay in short-term crisis programs to 120 days and long-term programs to 24 months and extending support of youth to 24 years of age.

Regulate and Tax Electronic Cigarettes
NYS PTA fully supports the Executive Budget proposal which requires regulation of electronic cigarettes in the "same manner as tobacco products" and includes like products in the Clean Indoor Air Act.

We also fully support legislation, regulation and/or other national, state and local measures to address the manufacturing of and ingredients in e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) including the prohibition of advertising, marketing and sale of e-cigarettes and other ENDS to youth (18 years or younger).

Alarmingly, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that e-cigarettes and ENDS use among students in grades 6-12 tripled in one year's time and are the most commonly used tobacco products among youth.

E-cigarettes and other ENDS are available in more than 7,000 fruit and candy flavors and use cartoons and celebrities, which are appealing to youth, in their advertising. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

(FDA) has taken the first step in establishing FDA oversight of e-cigarettes and other ENDS, much more needs to be done as there are no federal restrictions preventing the sale and advertising of e-cigarettes and other ENDS to minors.

NYS PTA and Nassau Region PTA proudly presented a resolution to the National PTA Convention in July 2016, which was unanimously adopted by National PTA. We look forward to working closely on this issue with the legislature and Governor's Office.

Heroin and Opioid Epidemic and Recovery

Heroin and prescription opiates continue to devastate families and communities across New York State. Young people under the age of 25 and their families are particularly impacted. Last year, New York State made addressing heroin and opiates a priority in both budget and legislation.

NYS PTA strongly supports the Executive Budget proposal to establish two pilot programs for Recovery High Schools; schools within a school to help students in substance abuse recover.

NYS PTA also supports the $30 million increase to combat the heroin epidemic in New York, and recommends $45.25 million in new funding, $15.25 million over the Executive Budget proposal.

NYS PTA supports the following proposals in the Executive Budget:

- Adding 80 new residential treatment beds run by not-for-profit providers;
- Open 800 additional opioid treatment program (OTP) slots, including the medication assisted treatment, buprenorphine;
- Funding for ten additional regional community coalitions and partnerships;
- Funding for another ten Family Support Navigator programs statewide;
- Adding another ten Peer Engagement Programs statewide;
- Funding eight new adolescent clubhouses;
- Funding five new recovery community and outreach centers;
- Opening ten additional 24/7 urgent access centers across the state; and
- Establishing two Recovery High School pilot programs.

NYS PTA supports the following legislation in the Executive Budget:

- Eliminate prior authorization requirements by expanding from inpatient to include outpatient substance use disorder treatment;
- Addition of eight Fentanyl analogs to New York State's controlled substances schedule;
- Increase access to Buprenorphine treatment; and
- Eliminate exemption of emergency department prescribers to consult the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) registry to combat "doctor shopping."

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

The NYS PTA supports the proposal to increase the New York State Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. This credit provides families who qualified for the Federal Child and Dependent Care Credit the ability to claim a percentage of the federal credit also on their state income taxes.

Youth Employment
The NYS PTA supports the $50 million increase to the New York Youth Jobs Program previously named Urban Youth Jobs Program. The original target areas under this program included Albany, Brookhaven, Buffalo, Hempstead, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, New York City, Rochester, Schenectady, Syracuse, Utica, White Plains, and Yonkers and then separate funding for youth outside these areas.

We also support the $5 million increase to the Summer Youth Employment Program.

Extending funding for summer employment offers students the opportunity to explore the world of work is always a plus. While the investment may be small, it is appreciated especially in our most challenged school districts where work based opportunities and exposure may be limited.

Raise the Age/Juvenile Justice
The Executive Budget includes legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to age 17 on January 1, 2019 and to age 18 on January 1, 2020.

NYS PTA continues to support legislation that reforms the Juvenile Justice System. We have called for:

- Changing State law to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 and to provide rehabilitation including behavioral health care and educational/vocational opportunities;
- Ensuring juveniles under age 18 are not placed in adult prisons or jails;
- Protecting juveniles by "Sight and Sound" separation from jailed adults;
- Moving the majority of cases to Family Court, and creating a new Youth Part for juveniles alleged to have committed more violent crimes;
- Expanding services proven to reduce the likelihood of re-offending, including alternatives to detention and incarceration and providing for conditional sealing of records for certain crimes;
- Using validated risk assessment tools when dealing with juveniles in the justice system, to tailor services for individual needs and combat racial and ethnic disparities;
- Complying with IDEA mandates including the right to a free public education complete with academics, therapies and other supports;
- Assisting youth leaving the juvenile justice system and prevent their return;
- Creating a non-punitive system and therapeutic response that better serves the needs of youth, keeping families together and enhancing community safety;
- Supporting funding for the expansion of juvenile justice and prevention services;
- Educating members and the community regarding issues, concerns and solutions for youth in the juvenile justice system; and
- Promoting initiatives to address racial, ethnic and socioeconomic inequities in the juvenile justice system.

Conclusion

We need to continue to build the success of our community through investments and support for our key resource; our children. Every parent has a dream for their child. It is our job to be dream makers.

We humbly ask that you continue to advocate for infusing our schools with the tools and resources necessary to accelerate the success of our children and families. Together, we can make every child's potential a reality. No other work is more important.