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UTICA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT / 929 YORK STREET / UTICA, NY 13502

To: Honorable Members of the New York State Legislature
From: Dr. Christopher Spence, Superintendent of Schools, Utica City School District
Date: January 29, 2025
Re: Testimony for Joint Legislative Hearing on the Executive Elementary and Secondary Education Budget

Thank you for this opportunity to share the funding priorities of the Utica City School District. The Utica City School District is highly dependent on state aid. Approximately 82% of our general fund budget is supported by state aid, property taxes make up approximately 12% of revenue. This limits the district's opportunity to raise revenue to support escalating costs associated with contractual obligations and benefits to support students. Foundation Aid accounts for over 75% of our state aid package which previously was provided to districts to pay for any and all expenses as the district deemed necessary to support student learning in the community served. However, the percentage allocated to the C4E set aside continues to increase, which specifies what the money can be used for and also requires additional reporting that requires additional resources to comply with.

Several highlights which are unique to the finding need of Utica Include:

1. **Career and Technical Education** - The school district needs to be able to access a new revenue stream in order to sustain the new Career and Technical Education programming which is scheduled to commence in SY 2025. Leveraging this aid is critical in sustaining this program into the future, especially as it relates to legacy costs for administration, faculty, staff, equipment, supplies, etc. The school district's program will complement what is currently offered by our regional BOCES and is projected to serve 100 students per pathway for a total enrollment of 1,200 students. The programming and pathways are the result of the recommendations of a district led Blue-Ribbon Task Force consisting of over 120 partners from business, industry, post-secondary institutions, etc. The school district's new CTE program is directly aligned with the New York State Education Department's new graduation measures initiative.
2. **Special Education** - Additional funding is needed for Special Education. The school district has seen a significant increase in students with high levels of academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs, especially since COVID, and at much younger ages. The school district has opened twenty-one (21) new special education classrooms, and hired additional support personnel, including Social Workers, related service providers, school counselors, etc., over the past two school years in order to better meet the intricate needs of these students.

3. **Academic Intervention Services** - In order to close the achievement gap in Math and ELA, Stephen Uebbing, who has been tasked by the NYS Association of Small City School Districts with determining the extent to which full funding of Foundation Aid is adequate to provide a sound basic education for the high need small city districts. It is estimated that the district would need to significantly increase the number of reading and math specialists in our schools to close the achievement gap. For SY 2024-2025, the Utica City School District added one math interventionist to each elementary school. The school district would need to deploy at least five math interventionists and at least two additional reading intervention specialists at each elementary school to close the achievement gap. In addition, the school district lacks the staff to effectively provide AIS services in Social Studies and Science at the secondary level as required.

4. **English Language Learners** - Nearly 20% of our student population is comprised of English Language Learners with over fifty (50) languages spoken. The current staffing is not adequate to meet their needs. The school district could also use additional funding to expand its Spanish Bilingual program at the elementary level.

5. **After-School Programming** - For SY 2024-2025, the school district is expanding after-school programming to begin this week at a cost of approximately \$3,247,380 for the second half of the school year only. This cost will double to be a full year program and possibly increase further due to additional participation for SY 2025-2026. Currently, over 800 students have signed up to participate. However, funding is not available to service all enrolled students. Additional funding is necessary to sustain this programming into the future and to meet the needs of all students.

Thank you for your continued support of the Utica City School District and our educational needs.