

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MEDIA CONTACT**

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## **Rochester City School Modernization Program Center of Political Mêlée**

Once again the Rochester School Modernization Program (RSMP) appears to be in danger of delay, or worse: confusion, misrepresentation and distortion. This \$1.3 billion dollar, multi-year, multi-phase modernization program will, over time, renovate and update our aging city schools. This has been the highlighted topic these past 2 weeks as there have been no less than 8 news articles and several letters written about this program. Unfortunately, efforts to derail this program continue. The most recent delay has occurred in the NY State Assembly when a simple bill, Assembly #A9758, designed to provide relief from a “Maximum Cost Allowance” provision in the state building aid formula was blocked by Assemblyman David Gantt (NY #137).

It is important to note that this bill was suggested by the State Education department, supported by the Rochester City School Board, approved by the Joint Schools Modernization Board, sponsored by Majority Leader Joseph Morelle (Irondequoit) and co-sponsored by Assemblyman Harry Bronson (Rochester). It does not increase costs to the State or the taxpayer. In fact, if enacted, this bill will result in an overall cost savings to the project as it will increase project efficiency, provide a mechanism to complete the renovations to eight (8) elementary schools and will save years of inconvenience and disruption to the schools and the communities they serve. By all accounts everyone close to the project supports this bill.

Simply put, we are at a loss to understand why an elected official from this area – or any community leader for that matter – would block a bill that only improves this program, a program that brings \$1.3 billion to our region and provides so much value to our youth, our educators, and our community? When assemblyman Gantt decided to block this measure he stated he did so because he has not had a chance to review this legislation, stating that “*most of those schools are in my district, and nobody even talked to me about this. This is about the future of the kids who live in my district.*” Mr. Gantt is correct, this is about the future of our kids. Below is the entire text of this legislation:

*Section 1. Paragraph a of subdivision 6 of section 3602 of the education law is amended by adding a new subparagraph 6 to read as follows:*

3 (6) *Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, for the purpose of computation of building aid for reconstruction or modernizing of no more than eight projects pursuant to chapter five hundred thirty-three of the laws of two thousand fourteen, multi-year cost allowances for each project shall be established and utilized two times in the first five-year period. Subsequent multi-year cost allowances shall be established no sooner than ten years after establishment of the first maximum cost allowance authorized pursuant to this subparagraph.*

11 § 2. *This act shall take effect immediately*

The reasons, the necessity, and the many advantages of this relief are detailed in a 6 page letter written by the Rochester City School Districts Board of Education, dated June 6, 2016 and addressed to the local sponsors of the bill (Morelle and Bronson). A copy of this letter was also provided to; Assemblyman David Gantt, Senator Joseph Robach, Senator Rich Funke, Senator Michael Rzenhofer, Mayor Lovely Warren and the Rochester Joint Schools Construction Board (RJSCB) Chairman Thomas Richards . It explains in great detail the reasons for this relief, it addresses several past concerns and what has been done to address those issues, the sense of urgency (for passage of this bill) and the significant problems that will arise if it does not pass the legislature in this session. The Rochester Board of Education, to their credit, has offered to take any one of, or all of, our legislative leaders on a tour of the facilities to show the significant progress accomplished in phase 1, the need for continued renovation work in future phases and to address any other concerns they may have.

This letter also addressed the district's efforts to secure this relief and their discussions with various State officials, and it states *"The tone of all these discussions has been generally positive, and we have heard no challenges to the rationale described above. In good faith, with full transparency to State officials and our community partners, we have developed our Phase 2 project plan with the assumption that MCA relief would be granted."*

It is our sincere hope that as we enter the last week of this legislative session that assemblyman Gantt will do the right thing and join the rest of our community leadership in support of this legislation and our community.

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