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October 15, 2014

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This letter was mailed and emailed to:

Representative Timothy Bishop

Representative Steve Israel

Representative Peter King

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Senator Charles Schumer

The Honorable Timothy Bishop  
United States House of Representatives  
306 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bishop:

New York State has been experiencing what is acknowledged to be the second largest influx of unaccompanied minors in the nation. Many of these youngsters are middle school and high school age, most with little or no formal schooling, and little or no English language skills. The majority of these minors are located in school districts that already enroll a large immigrant, often transient, population.

New York's public schools honor their responsibility to treat these students equitably, and provide the free appropriate public education to which they are entitled by law. Several challenges inhibiting our ability to do that include increases to enrollment, facilities, accommodations, services, and staffing. Compounding the situation are the limitations placed on schools by New York's property levy cap and a state law that fails to promptly recognize increases in enrollment.

Aside from the financial issues, the educational challenges presented by many of these students are significant. Many have had little to no formal education although they are similar in age to students in this country who are preparing to exit the educational system. Providing the necessary training for these individuals to be independent upon leaving school in a much shorter time frame requires some flexibility. Intensive English language training, career training, and basic skill development are crucial. In light of this, consideration should be given to flexibility in traditional high school pathways for the older students who are arriving. Flexibility is also needed regarding regulations that have these high-needs students of all ages negatively impacting school district assessments and rankings.

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There is an immediate and compelling need for the federal and state government and their respective education departments to respond with support for both the fiscal and regulatory flexibility that is needed. This is a societal and governmental issue with potential long-term impact on both the schools and the communities they serve.

We would be happy to discuss the needs with you in greater detail.

Sincerely,



Julie Davis Lutz, Ph.D.  
Legislative Co-Chair



Walter F. Schartner, Ed.D.  
Legislative Co-Chair

JDL/WFS/jc