



### **Memorandum in Opposition to S9833**

The Alliance for Quality Education, Education Law Center, and the Spring Valley Branch of the NAACP are writing in strong opposition to Senate Bill 9833 (S9833), which proposes slight changes to school funding in East Ramapo Central School District (ERCSD). While acknowledging that the fiscal and educational situation in ERCSD is dire, S9833 does nothing to address the systemic abuses that are at the core of ERCSD's troubles.

By declaring that, "[f]or years, the district has failed to adopt a budget which meets the basic needs of its public school students," S9833 recognizes that for over a decade, public school students in ERCSD have been denied the sound basic education they are guaranteed by the New York State Constitution. The bill also notes that the "district is at risk of being unable to pay its staff."

However, as the April 2024 report by the state-appointed ERCSD monitors detail, the risks to the district go well beyond this. ERCSD's crumbling school buildings are in urgent need of \$250 million dollars in repairs- with costs rising every year repairs aren't made. Moreover, the district projects at least \$24 million in increased operating expenses for next school year alone.

There are two major sources of this deficit. First, for over a decade, the ERCSD school board has engaged in a well-documented pattern of financial mismanagement and diversion of public funds to private schools. This behavior, described in state reports going back to 2014, has persisted despite the installation of a series of state-appointed monitors overseeing the district. Second, year after year, local voters have refused to vote for tax increases necessary to keep pace with increasing educational costs. As a result, the local share of public school funding has been woefully inadequate.

Assembly Member Kenneth Zebrowski has introduced legislation, A10407-A, to address these persistent problems. A10407-A, which we [support](#), proposes a fiscal control board, which would have the power to prevent mismanagement by ERCSD's school board and to raise the necessary local revenue.

By contrast, S9833 has no such mechanisms. Rather, it merely enables early apportionment of \$20 million of East Ramapo's calculated Foundation Aid for an extraordinary thirty years, with no provision to ensure its proper expenditure. In addition, S9833 calls for a one-time 1% tax increase for East Ramapo – a paltry sum in relation to the district's current and future needs. These provisions will do nothing to address the pattern of financial mismanagement by the school board, nor will they make a dent in the chasm between existing and necessary local contributions to school funding.

S9833 states that should the ERCSD fail to meet the requirements of the bill, including the 1% tax hike and proper management of school funding, the Legislature will then move to institute the Fiscal Control Board proposed by A10407-A. Unfortunately, the ERCSD board has shown, since at least 2014, that it is incapable of properly managing public school funding. And a generation of public school students have suffered the harm, deprived of the essential educational resources they need to learn. Despite years of oversight from state monitors, ERCSD board members have allowed school buildings to deteriorate to the point where students have no safe drinking water. And in a district with 52% English learners, there are major deficits at every stage of the process for identification, assessment, placement, and instruction of those students.

East Ramapo's schools, staff, parents, and students have no more time to wait. The Legislature must act now to put in place effective mechanisms to redress the damage caused by the ERCSD board and over a decade of failed budgets. It's time the needs of the children of East Ramapo take priority over the harmful politics of adults. We urge the Legislature to reject S9833 and enact A10407-A.