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## 2023-2024 Legislative Memorandum

**Subject: Providing School Aid Spin-Up to East Ramapo Central School District - S.9833 (Mayer)**

**Position: OPPOSE**

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The NYCLU opposes S.9833. This bill fails to provide the necessary oversight and local revenue needed to sustain equitable public education in the East Ramapo Central School District. Rather than move forward with this proposal, the NYCLU **urges the Senate to introduce and pass same-as legislation to A.10407-A.**

### East Ramapo: A District in Crisis

As S.9833 acknowledges, the East Ramapo Central School District is failing to provide an education that “*meets the basic needs of its public school students.*” This failure to provide the constitutionally required “sound basic education” is due to the combination of consistent mismanagement by the board majority and the failure of voters to increase local tax contributions for nearly a decade.

The results for students are disastrous: East Ramapo’s graduation rate is 23 points lower than the statewide average and the dropout rate is three times the state average.<sup>i</sup> For English language learners, things are worse: only 1 in 3 graduate and 1 in 3 drop out.<sup>ii</sup> Meanwhile, the district has the highest rate of English language learners (expected to approach 60% next school year)<sup>iii</sup> and homeless students (1 in 7)<sup>iv</sup> of any district in the state. Every school building in the district received a failing assessment on a recent state Building Conditions Survey,<sup>v</sup> and water fountains have been shut off for eight years due to lead in the fixtures.<sup>vi</sup>

However, giving the district a spin up without proper oversight or an adequate increase in local revenue rewards the district and perpetuates the problem, trapping public school kids in failing schools for another year. Without simultaneous governance reforms *and* increased funding, public education in East Ramapo will not improve. Yet, S.9833 fails to include improvement in educational opportunities as one of the standards set for the district to receive state funds.

S.9833 would provide an extraordinary 30 years of funding spin-up, in exchange for the district increasing its tax levy next year by a mere one percent (far short of what is needed). Should the district not enact this one-time tax hike, the bill commits the legislature to “*implement a fiscal control board pursuant to legislative bill number A. 10407-A.*” But there is no reason to create this contingent implementation of A.10407-A.

A.10407-A provides the solution the district needs right now. It does this by: (1) creating a fiscal control board, as has been implemented in multiple local governments around the state (New York City, Buffalo, Nassau County and others), (2) providing a multi-year means to both raise local revenues *and* issue the bonds necessary to repair and improve all school buildings, and (3) requiring measurable educational improvements. Proposed by Assemblyman Zebrowski, A.10407-A is supported by the Commissioner of Education, the NYCLU, Spring Valley NAACP, Alliance for Quality Education, Education Law Center and East Ramapo public school parents.

### **Conclusion**

For 15 years, New York has attempted an approach of second chances, warnings, and financial lifelines for East Ramapo. Yet educational opportunities have continuously worsened. A spin-up without accountability rewards the district for failing students of color. The legislature and governor must reject S.9883 and enact A.10407-A.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?year=2023&instid=800000039112>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?year=2023&instid=800000039112>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://eu.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2024/03/11/east-ramapo-ny-tension-grows-with-public-school-and-yeshiva-community-over-immigrant-homeless-kids/72854143007/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://eu.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2024/06/06/east-ramapo-bills-in-new-york-state-legislature-split-on-oversight/73987579007/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://eu.lohud.com/story/news/education/2023/07/13/ny-school-district-building-survey-fails-all-east-ramapo-campuses-other-buildings-unsatisfactory/70392511007/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://eu.lohud.com/story/news/local/rockland/2023/07/31/lead-contamination-in-east-ramapo-ny-school-water-remains-unsolved/70468305007/>