



New Jersey School Boards Association

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September 4, 2020

The Honorable Christine Norbut Beyer
Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Children and Families
50 East State Street, 2nd floor
PO Box 729
Trenton, NJ 08625-0729

Dear Commissioner Beyer:

I hope this correspondence finds you safe and healthy. On behalf of the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all of the state's public school districts, I respectfully express our strong opposition to the proposed cut to the School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP) in the Fiscal Year 2021 state budget.

As you are aware, the SBYSP provides students – in a school setting – with critically important supports, such as mental health counseling, employment counseling, substance abuse education and prevention, preventive health awareness, primary medical linkages, and learning support. Dozens of our member districts participate in the program and find it to be an incredibly valuable resource for thousands of students. As one of the top state programs that has achieved positive results for students and parents across New Jersey, it should not only be maintained, but strengthened and expanded.

In Fiscal Year 2020, school-linked services received an adjusted appropriation of just under \$15.3 million. When Governor Murphy proposed his original FY2021 to the Legislature in February, he proposed *increasing* that line item to nearly \$16.9 million. Unfortunately, on August 25, when the governor issued his revised budget plan for the nine-month FY2021, he proposed reducing the line item by nearly \$12 million from his original proposal, thus cutting the total appropriation to less than \$5 million. According to reports, the SBYSP will be completely eliminated by the end of September. The NJSBA, along with many local school board members and administrators across the state, is confused and disturbed by this drastic departure from the governor's original proposal and the change in the state's funding priorities.

We understand that we are in an unprecedented situation and the state is facing financially difficult times. We fully recognize that many hard choices will need to be made in order to address the economic realities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we do not believe that cutting critical services provided through the SBYSP is an appropriate way to meet these budgetary challenges. On the contrary, effective mental health and social supports for our students will be even more necessary in the months ahead as they return to school after an extended period of isolation.

It should come as no surprise that the proposed cuts to this program have sparked an outcry from the educational community. NJSBA leadership and staff have received numerous phone calls and emails urging our Association to oppose these cuts. In addition, an online petition urging the restoration of funding for the SBYSP was established shortly after the governor unveiled his revised budget. As of

September 3, more than 25,000 individuals have signed that petition. As the Legislature continues its review of the FY2021 budget proposal, we expect even more advocates and organizations to express their concern about the proposed reduction in funding for SBYSP.

NJSBA has conducted extensive research into programming that promotes the health and wellness of students. We believe that the School Based Youth Services Program is critical to the mental health and emotional well-being of our students.

Thank you for your consideration of the NJSBA's position on this important issue. I would be happy to discuss these matters with you or your staff personally. If you have any questions or need additional information, you may contact me at (609) 529-5154 or jpushman@njsba.org.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Pushman
Director of Governmental Relations, NJ School Boards Association

Cc: Dr. Larry Feinsod, Executive Director, NJ School Boards Association
Honorable Phil Murphy, Governor of New Jersey
Honorable Elizabeth Maher Muoio, NJ State Treasurer
Honorable Stephen M. Sweeney, President, NJ State Senate
Honorable Craig J. Coughlin, Speaker, NJ General Assembly
Honorable Paul A. Sarlo, Chair, Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
Honorable Eliana Pintor Marin, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee