

## **Testimony of Lon Seidman, Chairman Essex Board of Education HB 7019**

This evening I will be presenting the Essex Board of Education's budget to our Board of Finance.

I will have to explain to them that because we are making responsible reductions to our budget due to enrollment declines, the MBR mandate requires us to leave in at least \$45,000 we would have otherwise reduced.

Due to the compounding nature of this mandate, I will also need to inform them that we could see this number climb to as much as \$320,000 in five years. That figure is nearly 5% of our projected education spending in 2020.

In many ways Essex has been doing all of the things the state would like us to do: we regionalized many expensive services through a cooperative agreement with our neighboring towns and have a single administrative team managing all of our schools. We work very hard to keep our special education students in the least restrictive environment in their home schools. We invested in high efficiency boilers that have reduced our fuel costs significantly. And we are working to fully regionalize our elementary school with our Region 4 partners in Chester and Deep River.

In short we're doing all of the right things to ensure we can invest more in kids. But our enrollment is in a free fall. Our student population is down 35% since 2010 and is projected to continue that downward trend - we expect half the students we have today by the year 2020 just five years from now.

This year we are reducing two full classroom positions, a portion of an administration position that we may completely eliminate in a few years, and we have a few special education students leaving the district. All of the reductions being made are responsible adjustments based on what we need and are fully endorsed by our superintendent and my fellow members on the Board of Education.

I can't justify to local taxpayers the MBR mandated budget levels based on our enrollment projections. We also lack a means of pleading our case to anyone at the State Department of Education for relief - it appears as though our only option currently is to break the law and then ask the State Board of Education for forgiveness.

This legislation will help us and many other districts get through this period of rapid declining enrollment. I am not proposing the state do away with MBR, but I do hope that during this session some relief can be found for districts like ours struggling with only being allowed to reduce budgets by one half of one percent per year.