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Statement of Dr. L. Oliver Robinson President of the NYS Council of School Superintendents Regarding Governor Paterson's Remarks

There are roughly 680 school districts potentially affected by Governor Paterson's withholding of school aid and STAR payments, and the impact on various schools varies greatly. Some districts can manage a delay in revenues, but others may not be able to do so.

Speaking as the New York State Council of School Superintendents, which I serve as president, we have three primary concerns about the governor's action:

- First, the Governor offered two very different possibilities – are these delays or are they cuts? The Governor's office said, "As sufficient revenue becomes available, the state will *potentially* pay the amounts that were delayed [December 13, 2009 news release]." We can't wait until April to find out whether these are delays or actual cuts – by then it would be far too late in the school year for schools and communities to react to it.
- Second, last week \$146 million in school aid was withheld – either temporarily or permanently – but next month the governor intends to withhold nearly three times that sum -- \$436 million in STAR property tax reimbursement payments. Managing that revenue loss will pose greater challenges for more districts.
- Third, the action sets a troubling precedent. Aid to schools is paid according to formulas and schedules established in state law. No governor should have the power to unilaterally amend state laws. School districts propose budgets in good faith to our community based on state aid that is legally obligated by the state Legislature. If we do not challenge the governor's actions, this precedent will be set for future unilateral withholding of state funds to any municipality. This is not a political matter but a practical matter. The law is the law.

Like the Governor, superintendents must manage budgets, balancing needs against resources. School district leaders would be open to legislative action to help the state manage its cash flow challenges. It must be collaborative, not unilateral. School districts must be given a definite date in which aid would be paid.

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