

June 17, 2009

Dear Legislator:

This correspondence is to reiterate and clarify NYSUT's position regarding the agreement between the Governor and various other statewide unions, as well as the potential impact of this agreement as it may apply to the public pension benefits available to all future public employees.

NYSUT has and will continue to support the lawful right of all unions to collectively bargain the terms and conditions of employment on behalf of their members. Moreover, in terms of bargaining, NYSUT recognizes that all unions and workers differ fundamentally in terms of who their public employer is, the nature of the services that they provide, for whom those services are rendered and the statutory and/or other qualifications necessary for rendering those services. NYSUT does not support the imposition of negotiated changes on unions that are not parties to the agreement.

NYSUT represents over 600,000 people who work in, or are retired from, New York's schools, colleges, and health care facilities. NYSUT members are or were employed by various public employers, including the state of New York, local boards of education, the City University of New York, and the State University of New York. Depending on the nature of their position and public employer, they are able to participate in one of the state's public retirement plans or the Optional Retirement Plan.

Our members are facing many of the same challenges as other public and private sector workers in this difficult economy. Many NYSUT locals around the state have been in active negotiations with their employers to identify and achieve cost savings in health care and/or various other areas in order to save jobs and maintain quality services. Despite these efforts, NYSUT estimates approximately 5,000 teachers and other school-related professionals have received or will likely receive layoff notices and there are other workforce reductions in higher education. Unfortunately, these workforce reductions, which will fall disproportionately on newer workers with outstanding student loans and young families, negatively impact the delivery of quality public educational services around this state and threaten recent gains in closing the achievement gap.

Again, we recognize and support the efforts of other unions to mitigate potential layoffs without renegotiating the provisions of their contracts. To date, however, NYSUT has not been approached by any official regarding any proposal to assist any of our members who have been or scheduled to be laid off or to deal with the myriad of programs and services that have already been cut in so many local school budgets. Therefore, as with the "pay bills" that get enacted to ratify contractual provisions unique to state bargaining units, we ask you to limit all of the changes recently agreed upon to the members in the affected bargaining units.

NYSUT members in 700+ locals have tightened their “contractual” belts and have endured personnel cuts and our students have experienced severe program cuts in many school districts. Despite these measures, NYSUT members around the state continue to deliver quality educational services to our students in public K-12 and in higher education as attested to in significant improvements in student achievement.

NYSUT supports the right of other unions to negotiate changes for themselves but we CANNOT and WILL NOT support having any such agreement forced upon our members or anyone else. NYSUT members have stood with you through countless fights. Now, we ask you to stand with us in rejecting the Executive’s Tier V proposal so that our public schools and universities can continue to attract and retain the quality educators and other school-related professionals necessary to close the achievement gap and move our state forward to meet the needs of a changing economy.

I thank you in advance for your time and attention to this serious and pressing matter and for your continued support for the needs of NYSUT members and the children that they serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan B. Lubin".

Alan B. Lubin
Executive Vice President