

# BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

February 7, 2012

In response to the funding issues and proposals concerning the Board of Education, The Board of Garrett County Commissioners offers the following public statement relative to the Garrett County Board of Education and an appropriation of funding for Fiscal Year 2013.

It is important to understand that while the State of Maryland has cut funding to education in Garrett County due to the wealth factor formula and the declining student population, the County has increased funding in excess of requirements known as the maintenance of effort by \$860,000. In fiscal year 2012, the Board of Education funding level was reduced by the State by \$1.5 million while Garrett County increased funding by \$1.7 million which is equivalent to all of new tax revenue due the county.

The Commissioners recognize the serious financial situation the Garrett County Public School System is faced with at this time and also into subsequent fiscal years. All three County Commissioners have been present at each of the public hearings conducted by the Board of Education regarding the proposed school closings of Friendsville, Kitzmiller and Dennett Road Elementary. As such we had heard the concerns of hundreds of citizens. The Commissioners also recognize and emphasize that the issues and actions regarding school budgets, closure of schools, and the overall decisions about our school system rest in the elected members of the Board of Education. Any action on the part of the Board of Commissioners as the funding source is not intended to usurp their difficult decisions.

The closing of community elementary schools, eliminating instructional programs, and reducing personnel are all very complex decisions that will have long term implications on the public schools, ancillary programs and many affected communities. We have deliberated and identified the fact that public education is not only our number one fiscal priority, but also a notable objective of our future economic development vision. The downturn in the economy, reductions in school state level school funding require that all parties cannot continue to operate under the same paradigm. The new paradigm insists that we must not only do more with less, we must do better with less. Cost shifts from the state to the county, such as the teacher's pension, may significantly impact the county in the coming years. Vigilance towards containing costs is a must.

Garrett County Government has been experiencing a financial shortfall status and there are numerous challenges to secure funding for the provision of all public services for the residents, property owners, and visitors to Garrett County without operating with a structural deficit. Initial estimates reveal that the County real estate values have declined for Fiscal 2013 and likely will result in a loss of \$1.5 million in revenues to the County.

Therefore, we are willing and open to increase County Government's financial appropriation to the Garrett County Public School System but are unable to provide a solid figure at this time due to several variables.

- 1. The Board of County Commissioners will support legislation currently being proposed by Senator Edwards and Delegate Beitzel to cap the loss of State funding to any school district to a 5.5% limit and encourage the public to do the same.*
- 2. The Board of Education is encouraged to review retirement incentives in order to encourage retirements that will allow for the reduction of staff numbers without eliminating the jobs of new employees.*
- 3. The Board of Commissioners encourages the Board of Education to collaborate with the county in order to identify areas where overlapping services and practices may be consolidated and or reduced in order to mitigate costs related to maintenance of effort .*
- 4. The Board of Commissioners encourages the Board of Education to continue to engage the public, central office staff, instructional staff, and administrative personnel for input in ways to enhance and maximize operations as well as consider all options and proposals that can generate savings.*
- 5. The Board of County Commissioners will provide and direct additional funding, within affordability parameters, thus allowing the Board of Education the opportunity to look at a long range vision of school needs based on projected enrollments and community interests as contained in the reports to be presented by the school communities. The budget process is still in an early stage and with many funding related issues.*

Again, we appreciate the commitment, fortitude, and effort that the Board of Education, employees, and Mrs. Waggoner have dedicated over the past demanding and difficult months. We applaud the many citizens and members of the local education community who know that education is a key to our overall economic future and have been willing to speak out for our children. Garrett County will emerge from this "temporary" crisis in funding and when we do we hope to be a stronger community in many respects. We ask that we remain respectful of one another as we continue to work through this evolving process. We know some may have lost faith and confidence but please be assured that "we listen" and "we care" about the future of Garrett County. This process will take time and long range vision of what we want our County to look like 25 or even 50 years from now.