

Yudichak gathers information on school funding needs of third-class cities

HARRISBURG, April 2 – The House Urban Affairs Subcommittee on Cities-Third Class and the Education Subcommittee on Basic Education held a joint public hearing at Northampton Community College in Bethlehem today to learn more about the financial challenges school districts in third-class cities face.

"How the state funds public education is not only critical to the success of students, but it is also critical to the economic success of these smaller cities that are often dealing with declining tax bases and are struggling financially," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Luzerne, chairman of the House Education Subcommittee on Basic Education.

A third-class city is one with a population of less than 250,000. There are 53 third-class cities in Pennsylvania, including Nanticoke in Luzerne County.

Among those testifying was Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania, who told the panel that school districts in many third-class cities have greater resource needs because they have greater concentrations of poverty and immigrants.

"A new school funding formula has the capacity, over time, to support students, strengthen schools and relieve pressure on local property taxes to help redevelopment of older communities," Risch said.

According to Good Schools Pennsylvania, while statewide about 72 percent of students are proficient, the average for third-class cities is around 60 percent, with some falling below 40 percent. Good Schools Pennsylvania supports the findings of the costing-out study commissioned by House Democrats that outlined how much state and local funding is needed to ensure that all children can meet state-established education standards.

Yudichak said, "A good school district is generally one of the primary reasons young families choose a particular community in which to buy a home. If we improve the schools in our third-class cities, they will be in a better position to attract new residents, which in turn would help to strengthen them economically."

Also testifying were representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry, the Bethlehem Area School District and 10,000 Friends, an alliance of organizations and individuals committed to enhancing the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.