



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD
JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, MAYOR

March 20, 2018

State House
Boston, MA 02138

Dear Senator Montigny and Representatives of the New Bedford Legislative Delegation:

I am writing to discuss a number of issues related to the ongoing fiscal sustainability of local finances. There are a number of issues which impact municipalities in general, and the City of New Bedford in particular, about which I believe you should be aware.

Municipal Public Safety Staffing Grant

The State's FY 2018 budget includes \$3,350,000 for grants to localities who spent less than \$200 per capita on their police budgets in FY 2010. The definition was recently expanded to include per capita spending on fire budgets, but eligibility was limited only to localities that had submitted grant applications in past years. This eligibility limitation appears to have been designed to permanently ensure no additional communities can qualify because none would have submitted past grant applications. Be advised that New Bedford spent \$221 per capita on Police and \$137 per capita on Fire in FY 2010, which would qualify the City, if not for the exclusionary "previous year" grant application requirement.

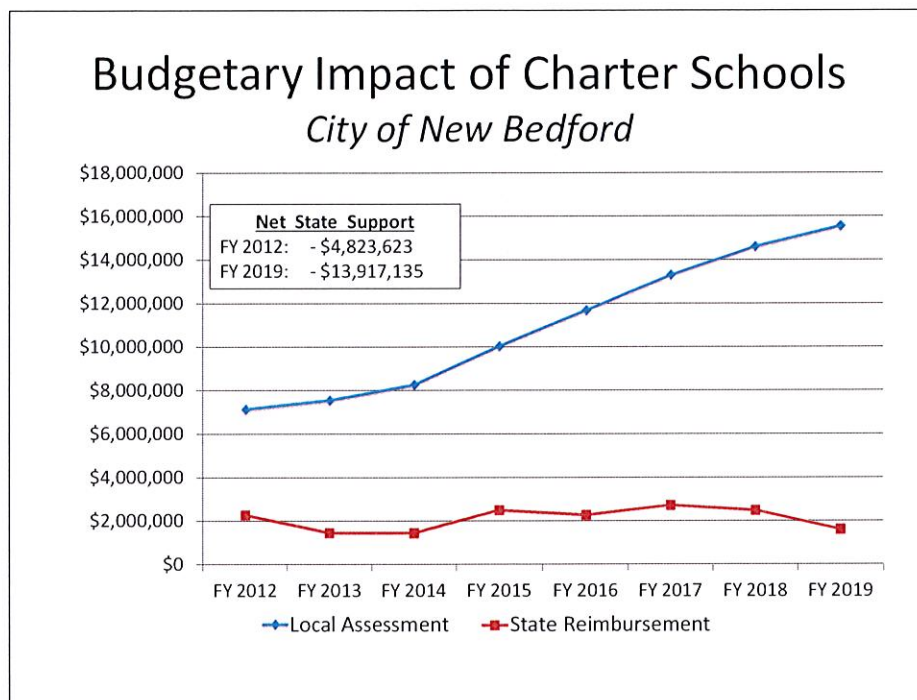
The stated purpose of the Municipal Public Safety Staffing program is to restore or retain laid-off police officers and/or firefighters, or to provide additional overtime funding for those departments. It is ironic (and inequitable) that wealthy jurisdictions such as Newton and Framingham continue to receive allocations under this grant while others do not. Given that the City of New Bedford is facing expiration of our Federal SAFER grant, which funds 21 firefighters, in FY 2019, we are greatly in need of any assistance which would allow us to maintain public safety staffing levels. New Bedford could benefit significantly from inclusion in the grant program, and the City would welcome your efforts to amend the program accordingly.

Chapter 70 Aid & Charter School Funding

The inability of the Commonwealth to fully fund the Foundation Budget and meet its statutory obligations to support the impact of charter schools and the Special Education Circuit Breaker program has had a significant impact on the City's finances. Cost increases in special education continue to exceed funding under Chapter 70, particularly in the areas of special education tuition, behavioral and therapeutic services, and annual funding has failed to meet the target established in State law to reimburse localities for 75% of the cost of out-of-district placements.

The Massachusetts Municipal Association estimates that the Governor's proposed budget underfunds school transportation, circuit breaker and charter school accounts by \$161.7 million combined, a shortfall that increases by \$22.1 million from FY 2018-2019, and the annual budget process has failed to address the recommendations of the Foundation Budget Review Commission..

The increasing impact of these budgetary decisions is nowhere more evident than in the case of charter school funding. District assessments for charter schools increased by \$280.1 million statewide, or 136%, from FY 2007-2016. According to the preliminary Cherry Sheets, charter schools will divert nearly \$14 million net from the New Bedford Public Schools in FY 2018. These are funds that could be used for enhanced instruction, building repair and technology investments, the lack of which increases the challenges involved in maintaining an effective learning environment for our students. Your support for full funding of the charter school accounts in particular would be tremendously helpful to ongoing efforts to improve the performance of New Bedford Public Schools.



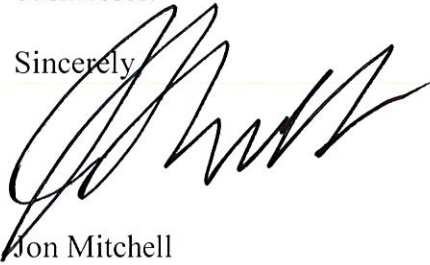
Chapter 90 Local Transportation Aid

An analysis by the Massachusetts Municipal Association documented that cities and towns across the state need to spend at least \$639 million annually to maintain and bring the Commonwealth's 30,000 miles of local roads into good repair. My understanding is that the Governor has proposed a \$200 million bond bill allocation for Chapter 90, which would provide funding at levels comparable to FY 2018, when New Bedford received \$2.1 million. The City of New Bedford is doing its part: In FY 2017 we began to supplement Chapter 90 funding with a \$1 million allocation from the City's Capital Improvement Program.

However, these sources are far below the amount needed to maintain the City's 337 miles of roadway. I believe that it is essential that funding in this area be considered for enhancement, including the possibility of additional revenue sources, if our road networks are to be maintained properly.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you further how we can strengthen the State-local partnership and bolster the City's efforts to pursue a financial sustainable path that takes into account the interests of our residents and businesses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Mitchell', written over a light yellow horizontal line.

Jon Mitchell
Mayor

cc: New Bedford City Council
New Bedford School Committee