

THE BOARD OF GARRETT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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May 6, 2013

Janet S. Wilson, Superintendent
Garrett County Board of Education/Garrett County Public Schools
40 South Second Street
Oakland, Maryland 21550

Superintendent Wilson:

I am writing in response to the "Open Letter to the Citizens of Garrett County" from the Garrett County Board of Education.

Most broadly viewed, the letter serves as a "call-to-action." First and foremost, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously and wholeheartedly supports this call. More specifically, the letter describes the eroded fiscal environment that the Garrett County Public School System has recently faced, as well as the likely continuation of this fiscal erosion given current economic conditions. It further, and rightly, describes the strain that such conditions will present to our public schools, our instructional, educational, and support professionals, our current and future student bodies, the communities that have a public school as a cornerstone, and the competitive position of our business development environment. While the specifics of these conditions, their causes, accelerants, and mitigants, can and should be debated, they do indeed call us all to action. There is a forum for this, and all County departments, agencies, offices, and component units need to be more realistic and work within the constraints of the economic situation instead of resorting to politics.

Finally, the letter contains two explicit requests to the Commissioners:

1. *to meet with the Board of Education in public session*
2. *to provide budgetary commitments for "2015 and beyond."*

On April 16, 2013, I responded to the Elected Members of the Garrett County Board of Education affirming that the Board of County Commissioners appreciates their invitation to meet and discuss the "Future of the Garrett County Public School System." In that correspondence I stated that planning for future year funding/budgets is now more significant than at any time in the past. County Government has for some time reviewed current budgets along with 5 impending years, and this practice has proven to be a wise judgment which is evident when comparing actual/final budgets to initial budget estimates. County Government and the Board of County Commissioners have made public education a priority for many years. Now more than ever open dialog and cooperation, to include the participation of the County Administrator, Superintendent of Schools, and senior staff from both our organizations, is imperative.

To address these requests, I respectfully and humbly issue my own call to you and the Elected Members of the Board of Education. This is a call-to-partnership. The fiscal strains that we must address are both economic and demographic. Their solutions require a cooperative response to the call-to-action

with which we find ourselves presented. The solutions, for which we both search, require a thoughtful and strategic action plan. I believe our action plan must consider new and creative solutions.

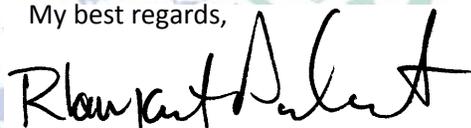
I would endorse the following:

1. The charter and formation of a multidisciplinary advisory board with members from the County Departments of Financial Services and Economic Development, Garrett College administrative staff, Garrett County Public School System administrative staff, you, and me.
2. The task of this advisory board would be to develop a range of specific proposals for addressing the fiscal strain on the Garrett County Public School System and the economic predictions for Garrett County Government over the short and long-term.
3. Our respective Boards should be updated during our administrative review. The combined evaluation and finalization of these proposals by the Board of County Commissioners and the Board of Education will be presented in public forum to allow for public commentary and a definitive plan for immediate implementation.

The Board of County Commissioners, Departments of Financial Services and Economic Development management, and I support financial planning and certainly believe that these requests can be best addressed only after all parties have conducted the work necessary to present solutions that we are prepared to stand behind and execute collectively. I am convinced that extended open-ended and potentially divisive public debate on these issues will ultimately serve no productive end.

Finally, I ask for your partnership and I offer my pledge to be open and forthright. I would ask for this in return. I believe our mutual accountability to address these issues will serve as a powerful motivator for the open, transparent, and creative dialog that will be required to solve them.

My best regards,



R. Lamont Pagenhardt

cc: Board of County Commissioners
Members of the Board of Education
Evan West
Wendy Yoder
Scott Weeks