

Dear Editor,

As work continues to craft a new state operating budget for the fiscal year that begins in less than three months, we face significant challenges.

Unlike the federal government, Delaware must pass a balanced budget. In fact, the state can only budget 98-percent of its projected revenue – a hedge against accidentally going into the red.

While understanding the difficulty of the task, I feel I need to speak out against some of the cuts Gov. Jack Markell has recommended as part of his proposed FY 2011 budget.

Chief among these cuts are a combined \$6.48 million in funding for school transportation maintenance and fuel costs. It's my belief these reductions balance the state budget at the cost of throwing the finances of local school districts into disarray.

These expenses won't disappear, but will be passed along. While the governor has promised not to raise taxes this year, his recommended budget could force local schools to do so on his behalf.

Additionally, Gov. Markell has proposed completely abolishing the subsidies for transportation to private schools and eliminating funding for school nurses in the same institutions.

Many Delawareans might not have a problem with dropping the hammer on private schools, but they need to consider that parents who choose this option also pay local taxes, significantly subsidizing public schools. The governor's cuts will likely result in increased tuition costs, possibly forcing some of these families to place their children into the public education system. Instead of saving money, the cuts could easily prove counterproductive. Each child moved from private school increases public school costs, stretches limited resources, and results in lower quality in the classroom.

Another consideration is that many private schools have a religious component that is fundamental to the morals and traditions of the families that utilize them. In my opinion, the state should avoid any action that could potentially weaken the diversity of our communities and the values that support them.

As a school administrator for more than 30 years, I understand the need to make tough choices. However, balancing the state budget by driving costs to public and private schools is unfair to these institutions as well as the taxpayers and parents that support them.

Sincerely,
State Rep. Nick Manolakos
20th Representative District