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**From**

**Legislator Tom Cilmi**

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## **MANDATE RELIEF MAKES FOR STRANGE BEDFELLOWS**

Suffolk County Legislator Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore), New York State Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel (D-Great Neck) and North Hempstead Supervisor Jon Kaiman (D-Great Neck) met today in New York City with Assemblywoman Deborah Glick, Chairwoman of the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, to plead their case with respect to relief from what Cilmi calls the "F.I.T. Mandate."

Counties in New York State are required to pay for the difference between resident and non-resident tuition for students who choose to attend community colleges outside their home counties. The State considers the Fashion Institute of Technology a community college despite the fact that the renowned New York City school offers Baccalaureate and Masters Degrees. Cilmi says Suffolk taxpayers have unfairly paid tens of millions of dollars to F.I.T. This year the County has budgeted more than \$6 million. The cost is expected to grow to \$7 million in 2012, a cost which outgoing County Executive Steve Levy wants to pass on to Suffolk's ten towns.

The meeting comes on the heels of three significant developments. First, legislation sponsored by Senator Owen Johnson (R-Babylon) and Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel which would change New York State Law and require counties to pay for no more than two years of education at F.I.T. (this measure is stalled in the State Legislature); second, a court ruling in Nassau County v. North Hempstead stating that North Hempstead is only liable to Nassau County for two years of education at F.I.T. (Nassau County passes its out of county tuition cost to the towns, a point of contention with North Hempstead); and third, a resolution sponsored by Legislator Cilmi and passed by the Suffolk Legislature, prohibiting the Comptroller from making payments to F.I.T. for more than two years of education.

Cilmi said, "This is a remarkable situation in which Republicans and Democrats, officials from at least three counties all bearing significant financial burden, as well as town and State governments are in agreement and working together. We should not be forced to fund this school for more than two years of a student's education. Governor Cuomo has talked about relieving counties and local municipalities of unfunded

mandates. This is a great place to start. Those before us have talked about this problem. It's about time we turn words into action. I, for one, am not going to stop until we get this done."

Asked why counties have been dealing with this burden for so many years, Cilmi said, "Frankly, I guess for others and in better economic times, it just wasn't a priority, but I am not going to sit around, pound my fist on the desk and blame others. I made a commitment to my constituents and to the residents of Suffolk County that I would fight for them at every level of government and that's what I'm doing."

The freshman legislator said the meeting with Chairwoman Glick was cordial. "We certainly thank Assemblywoman Glick for her time and interest. She said she would look into the matter and I have every reason to take her for her word."

The meeting comes just one day after H. Carl McCall was appointed by Governor Cuomo as Chairman of the SUNY Board of Trustees, the governing body of New York's system of public colleges. What makes this situation politically interesting is that the President of F.I.T., Joyce F. Brown, is McCall's wife. Cilmi said he hopes that politics and personal relationships don't impede the process or get in the way of common sense and fairness.

According to Legislator Cilmi there is no timeframe for a follow up meeting but, he says, "We are all pushing to get this done as quickly as possible. Our taxpayers are drowning in a sea of out of control mandated costs which keep getting shifted from one level of government to another. We all need relief now."