

Dear Waterford RTM Members,

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I am writing as a parent, teacher and Waterford tax payer in response to the proposed \$470,000 budget cuts to the education budget. My husband and I have lived in Waterford for the past 12 years and I have been fortunate to have been a teacher and literacy specialist/interventionist in Waterford for the past 19-20 years.

As a teacher out of college, I chose to work in Waterford because of its commitment to excellence in education and focus on being a leader in technology and educational best practice. After working here for just a few years, both my husband and I were continually impressed by the strength of the community, exceptional schools and overall hometown feeling that is felt in every aspect of the town. Being part of the Waterford community was not just something that we admired but wanted to be part of. We chose to buy a house here, raise our children here and send them to Waterford Public Schools. Since then we have been continually impressed by the exceptional education provided by devoted teachers and staff that continually go above and beyond.

Waterford Public Schools and the staff are not the norm but the exception. They are admired and looked up to by not just other schools but by other towns and parents. This is because we continually always do what is best for our students. We hire not only excellent staff but continue to educate them and provide support to make them leaders within the field of education. We provide our interventionists and special education teachers with not just ordinary training but specialized training that has other districts, parents and even the International Dyslexia Association taking notice and wanting to know what we've done and how we've done it! These types of educational decisions require a tremendous amount of planning, time and money but they benefit our neediest students in the most magnificent ways. This is what makes Waterford Public Schools exceptional!

While listening to the RTM budget meeting and the proposed cuts I kept thinking that these types of cuts and comments are not the Waterford that we have come to know and love. As an educator and parent, I thought about all of our students but particularly our neediest and most at risk students. As a literacy specialist/interventionist, I see these students on a daily basis and see that these are our students that are at greatest risk. Unfortunately, no matter what we do when budgets are cut these are the students who feel the greatest impact. Sadly, these are also the children who are most at risk right now during the COVID 19 national pandemic.

When listening to the proposed cut of \$470,000, I thought of these students and how this will negatively impact them through program and staff cuts. As both a parent, fellow resident and their teacher, I feel the need to not only speak out on their behalf but advocate for

them. Your cuts will hurt the neediest of all of our students. You spoke about being the voice of ALL residents and not just teachers. Well, these children, many times, do not have a voice to represent them. It is us, the people of this town, who need to be their voice. During a crisis this town should be coming together, not pulling apart and being divisive. We should not be making such severe educational cuts that will jeopardize the education of our students during a time when we know that many of our students will require more supports not less. Waterford needs to be a beacon of hope for our families and students not a community that is jeopardizing the education of our students in the most crucial time in modern history.

It made me sad and outraged as a parent, teacher and tax payer while listening to the RTM comments and rationale for the budget cuts. As parent, but more importantly as a caring human being, this seems incredibly wrong during this time as it will impact the neediest of all of us. Please reconsider your offer and think about your actions. Your actions have consequences and ripple effects that will impact all of our community and children, but most importantly the most vulnerable and needy of our children living in Waterford.

Thank you for reading and hearing my concerns,

Erika Bassett

Waterford Resident, Parent and Educator