

September 25, 2006

**Suffolk Grand Jury Report critical of lucrative benefit packages to school administrators, calls for legislative changes, recommends citizen oversight before school boards okay generous salary and benefit deals**

Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota today announced the release of a 218-page report by the special grand jury he impaneled in September of last year to view evidence of corruption and review spending practices in Suffolk County's seventy school districts.

District Attorney Spota called the voluminous report "a roadmap for the elimination of the fraud, waste and mismanagement" found by the grand jury during its investigation.

The grand jury viewed nearly five hundred evidentiary exhibits and listened to testimony from 138 witnesses during the probe. Spota said each district in the county would receive the report, as will the Governor and the leaders of the State Assembly and Senate.

The grand jury made four major findings in the report:

1. A lack of oversight and internal controls by those charged with the responsibility to safeguard taxpayer's money;
2. Large expenditures of public funds for compensation and fringe benefits to school administrators that are largely hidden from taxpayers and designed to be beyond taxpayer control;
3. The public pension system for school district employees is being defrauded of millions of dollars in taxpayer monies; and
4. The misuse of hundreds of thousands of dollars in educational grants.

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The district attorney said, "the grand jury was alarmed at the lack of public notification and knowledge about lucrative benefits packages" awarded to many school administrators, particularly "private retirement accounts" paid to the administrators "beyond their state pensions".

"The Grand Jury found that taxpayers have no meaningful access to information about the largest school district expenditures – the salaries and enhanced benefits being paid to school district administrators," said Spota. "The way things are now, the average taxpayer to understand what's going on, would have to be fairly knowledgeable about life insurance products, including annuities and the like, if that average taxpayer could get his or her hands on the information to begin with," DA

Spota noted. "Remember that this grand jury had subpoena power and a team of auditors combing through thousands of documents, interviewing school officials, all the while clarifying volumes of sophisticated financial data."

"The grand jury has found that there has to be a better way to make the average citizen aware of the salaries and perks paid to administrators financed with their tax dollars," said DA Spota.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy attended today's press conference and congratulated the district attorney's office and the grand jury for their work. "The additional staff and resources my administration provided both the District Attorney and the County Comptroller helped provide an unprecedented level of oversight and accountability over how the public's tax dollars are spent," said County Executive Levy. "I congratulate the citizens who served on the jury and the district attorney on their outstanding work."

State Senator Owen Johnson ((4th Senate District, Babylon), secured a \$300,000 state grant for the district attorney's office to further the probe of corruption in school districts. "I applaud District Attorney Spota for this sweeping and thorough investigation," Senator Johnson said, "and look forward to working with him to implement changes to state law that will protect taxpayers and ensure that every education dollar is spent wisely."

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