

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak to the members present and a special thank you to Senator Argall for arranging this public hearing on Property Tax Issues relating to the Hazleton Area School District.

I am here on behalf of the many Schuylkill County residents who are paying property taxes to the Hazleton Area School District. Some have children attending the various schools in the HASD; others are Senior Citizens who are struggling to pay these taxes.

The Hazleton Area School District provides public education to the Greater Hazleton Area; it serves an area of approx. 285 sq. miles and has an enrollment of 10,690 students from K- 12th grade. From this number of 10,690 students, McAdoo Boro, Kline Twp, East Union Twp. and N. Union Twp. located in Schuylkill County, there is only a total of 864 children attending the Hazleton Area School District yet the citizens from Schuylkill County always pay a larger amount every time the taxes are raised.

I would like to present to you petitions totaling 550 names protesting the formula used to calculate every time there is an increase in the millage. There should be a lot more signatures but some petitions were stolen, some citizens weren't sure if they should sign it depending on their home address and some were indifferent because they feel the law makers in Harrisburg would not do anything about it anyway and consider it to be a lost cause.

Over the last several years, the school taxes of Schuylkill County property owners have increased dramatically. Yes, Luzerne County and Carbon County property owners have also seen an increase in their taxes, but it is at a much lower rate. Yes, Schuylkill County was re-assessed in 1996, Carbon County was re-assessed also and Luzerne County has been just completed. It is very difficult to understand how Schuylkill County continues to be increased at a higher rate than the other 2 counties. Furthermore, it is extremely frustrating to the taxpayers of McAdoo and Schuylkill County that a home with a greater value than theirs located within a 5-mile radius is actually taxed at a lower rate.

Each time the school district raises the taxes, here is an example of what happens, this is based on market value of \$100,000.00 home: Schuylkill County residents would pay \$1,417.59, Luzerne County residents would pay \$869.80 and Carbon residents would pay \$943.51, Luzerne and Carbon are close but Schuylkill County is about \$500.00 more. How is this fair and equitable? In previous years, it has been the same with the Schuylkill County residents paying higher taxes. These figures are from the office of the Business Manager of HASD.

In talking to several School Directors, they basically said they didn't realize it would have this affect on the Schuylkill County residents, a 2 mill increase didn't seem to be too high but when the figures were broken down by each county, then it was a different story.

Andrew DeBalko, McAdoo Borough's Tax Collector who also looked into this problem, gave the McAdoo Borough Council a letter he received from Mr. Ryba, HASD Business Manager, showing a property half located in Schuylkill and half in Luzerne, The taxes were as follows-for the half located in Luzerne County \$1,555.35 and the other half of the house located in Schuylkill County was \$1,983.98. How can this be? The same property that is assessed and

taxed had a \$400.00 difference. Doesn't that show you that there is a definite problem and it has to be and must be corrected?

It's the old saying the wheels on the bus go round and round, the citizens go to the School Board Directors to protest, their answer is we receive the formula from the State Tax Equalization Board and we must follow it, the State Tax Equalization Board says we have to follow the rules from the Department of Education and the Dept. of Education say its up to the lawmakers to set policy.

I know that Senator Argall met with the State Tax Equalization Board and they stated that there was another option to use for taxing purposes for school districts with students attending from various counties Option A and Option B according to 24PS6-672 of the Education Code but after giving the information to the Business Manager of HASD, we were told that many of the alternatives were not applicable except for Section C but he couldn't even begin to calculate the formula until Luzerne County's new reassessment figures were recorded which takes approximately 2 years to complete and even then there is no glimmer of hope, because those calculations could be higher than what we are paying now so we don't know as of yet nor can this be presented to the School Directors until this is compared to the present system.

In an ideal world, the best thing would be to eliminate property taxes, and the second best, would be to make renters pay some kind of school tax, please tell our citizens why does the burden always have to fall on the property owners. There are so many inequities in this present tax system that there is always going to be issues but with economic problems of today. How are our citizens going to continue to survive with the constant tax increases? All we ask today is that all the citizens of each county be treated fairly.

Our community has many elderly, retired and disabled individuals as well as the surrounding communities. These individuals can barely afford necessities, and they struggle to pay their taxes just so they can continue to live in their own home. Younger couples are working two and three jobs just so they can provide a home for their children

Many citizens feel that the inexplicable Property Tax Problem isn't being addressed to their satisfaction. This Tax Debate has been going on for years and years with seeming no answer in sight and so we look to you for guidance as you hear our concerns and ask you to find a way to help us with this extremely important issue.

*Thank you.
Councilwoman Mary Labert
Borough of McAdoo*