

## **Manhasset District Response to Reclaim New York Press Release**

Brandon Muir, the Executive Director of Reclaim New York recently issued a press release regarding the ongoing litigation between Reclaim New York and the Manhasset School District, and specifically about the recent agreement reached between Reclaim New York and Manhasset to satisfy a request for certain financial records pursuant to the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). Mr. Muir's press release does not correctly state the facts and ignores the District's longstanding dedication to fiscal transparency. It is troubling that Mr. Muir's organization, which claims that its purpose is to provide citizens with the facts about its government, would so blatantly misrepresent facts in its own statements to the public.

The Manhasset School District opposed Reclaim NY's FOIL request from the very beginning. This was not an effort on the District's part to withhold information from the District's residents, but because the original request was so needlessly excessive in its scope that the District would have had to make an unreasonable effort to collect, review and redact the vast quantity of information and data requested. Furthermore, complying with the request without first reviewing and redacting the records would have meant the disclosure of personal information about many of the District's students, parents and employees. This would have amounted to an invasion of the privacy of those individuals that the District was unwilling to allow. Fortunately, as Reclaim NY is well aware, FOIL does not permit disclosure of records that would violate student confidentiality or constitute an invasion of privacy of private citizens. Other government agencies may have been content to allow Reclaim NY to invade the privacy of its citizens; we are not. The reasons for the District's unwillingness to comply with the FOIL request were made known to Reclaim NY from the outset.

Recently, Reclaim NY acknowledged that its request was unreasonable based upon the fact that, following negotiations between the attorneys for Reclaim NY and the District, Reclaim NY significantly reduced the volume and narrowed the scope of its request in a way which addressed all of the District's objections. Among other things, Reclaim agreed to reduce the more than 15 data fields it had originally sought down to 4 data fields and removed those fields that would have required tremendous effort to ensure accurate and complete redaction. The modification of the document request was so dramatic that it all but constituted an admission from Reclaim NY that its original request was completely improper. In negotiating this settlement, the District acknowledged no wrongdoing, and waived none of its rights or defenses in the pending litigation. Obviously, since Reclaim NY was always aware of the District's objections, these negotiations could have been done prior to the filing of the current lawsuit, but Reclaim NY chose to take the matter to court, needlessly imposing costs on both parties. Incredibly, Reclaim NY now seeks to be compensated by the District's taxpayers for the costs it has incurred in the law suit.

Mr. Muir has stated in his press release that, "Manhasset residents shouldn't have to pay thousands of dollars, file appeals, and wait months, to see public documents that their government is legally required to maintain." We quite agree. That is why, following the significant modification of Reclaim NY's request, the District has happily disclosed the requested documents, and why the District now calls on Reclaim NY to acknowledge its error in making its initial document request, and drop its frivolous claim to legal fees for this ill-advised litigation.