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Congress of the United States
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March 2026

Dr. Lily Laux
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
100 Riverview Plaza
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Education Commissioner Laux:

I hope this message finds you well. As Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education, you know firsthand how important it is to have affordable, accessible, and quality childcare and early education in the great Garden State. We both know that early education leads to better outcomes for our children, and that without accessible childcare and early education, parents' capabilities to provide for their families are constrained. As such, I am reaching out to you today to ask for the State's assistance in ensuring that Somerville, Somerset County, can provide new preschool opportunities in the next school year.

In the 118th Congress, I was honored to support and secure a nearly \$3.8 million-dollar federal grant for the Greater Somerset County YMCA to expand and build preschool classrooms in the Somerville YMCA. These classroom expansions at the Somerville YMCA, which meet the New Jersey Department of Education's preschool standards, include space for six new classrooms with each classroom being able to hold up to 15 students. I am thrilled that construction is now complete, and that the Somerville Board of Education, together in community partnership with the Y, is prepared to take on up to 90 students in the 2026-2027 school year.

As part of this effort, the Somerville BOE is seeking to partner with the Somerville YMCA, which previously operated a preschool program for many years. Due to significant flooding and subsequent renovations—which were completed using federal funds that I secured to meet PEA requirements—the YMCA had to temporarily cease operations and close its license. They have now completed renovations and are reapplying for licensure through NJDCF; however, as you know, this process can take several months.

According to Somerville, this creates a challenge under N.J.A.C. 6A:13A-9.1(d), which requires a provider to have operated a preschool program in past years. Given the YMCA's long-standing history and the temporary nature of the closure, Somerville has submitted a waiver request to allow this partnership to proceed.

The lack of a guarantee for a September opening remains a major concern. Several critical deadlines are fast approaching:

- PEA grant budgets are due April 1st
- Contracts with providers are due April 27th
- Somerville must notify families this week regarding preschool placement

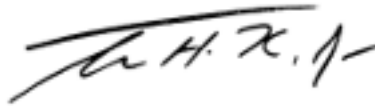
At this time, Somerville has approximately 60 students who would be without placement if this initiative cannot confidently move forward. As a district, Somerville has an obligation to ensure all eligible students are served, and they cannot risk families being left without a program if this does not come to fruition prior to August.

While Somerville has identified other providers as a contingency, Somerville strongly prefers to partner with the YMCA because of their facility's quality and location. However, those alternative options require a commitment by April to hold their space, meaning Somerville would be forced to proceed with one of them absent an assurance from the YMCA.

To ensure that Somerville can provide local families with reliable information, I respectfully ask for your assistance in confirming that the waiver and licensing process will conclude before the school year begins.

Thank you again for your time and dedication to the children of New Jersey. Should you wish to further discuss, please do not hesitate to reach out at (908) 547-3307.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Kean, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Kean, Jr.
Member of Congress