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February 13, 2017

The Honorable Lou Ann Linehan
State Senator
Room #117
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Senator Linehan,

We appreciate you reaching out to the Millard Board of Education in regards to the ongoing discussion of property tax relief. We can certainly understand the concerns of taxpayers across Douglas County with the sudden increase in their valuations. Thank you for the work you do both in and outside of the legislature to find sustainable answers for your constituents. It is an important conversation that is long overdue.

We share in your constituents' frustration. Our Sarpy County residents have paid significantly more for years than their Douglas County counterparts, yet we serve all students equally and each receives a quality education no matter what side of the county line they live on. I am especially proud of the work our Board has done over the last several years keeping a continuous string of cuts away from the classroom, and once that was no longer possible, working through the selective abandonment process with our community to determine where the least intrusive reductions could be made.

As we shared with you recently, the impact has been felt. Over the past seven years, we have increased our students by 1,211 while decreasing our teaching staff by 41 full-time equivalent positions and our administrative staff by three full-time equivalent positions. With our receipts increasing just 0.9 percent each of these years, we've held our expenses to a 1.2 percent increase.

The two largest categories of funding for school districts in Nebraska are state aid and property taxes. When decisions are made to reduce reliance on one of these sources, there is a necessary increase in reliance on the other. Currently, the Nebraska Legislature is considering substantial changes in the state aid formula in order to reduce the costs of such for the state. These changes will result in an increased reliance on property taxes at the district level.

Millard's Board of Education has always been exceedingly careful to manage tax dollars wisely. We are and consistently have been one of the lowest spenders per student in the state. In the 2015-16 school year, we were the third lowest spending school district per student in the state.

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