

An Open Letter to Commissioner Mike Hart

Posted by [TBN Editor](#) On 12/27/2016

Commissioner Hart:

The Executive Boards of the Calvert Education Association (CEA) and the Calvert Association of Educational Support Staff (CAESS), the bodies elected by the employees of Calvert County Public Schools to represent them, are very troubled by your actions over recent months. In mid-September, you made several public statements in opposition to the recently ratified contract between county school employees and the elected Board of Education which includes restorative steps designed to begin bringing teacher pay in the county a little bit closer to the pay teachers are contractually supposed to receive, but which the county has failed to fund year-after-year.

When CEA and CAESS representatives spoke with you regarding the issue, you insistently offered to arrange a meeting between representatives of our organizations, yourself and the county budget director to discuss the county's finances with regard to the teacher's and support staff's new contracts. You even offered to provide pizza. The meeting was scheduled for November 17. Representatives of our organization arranged, at some inconvenience, to attend. Approximately two hours before the meeting was to take place, you had the Executive Administrative Assistant to the County Administrator email our office to cancel it. We were told that your legal counsel had advised you to cancel the meeting, presumably on the morning it was to take place.

CEA and CAESS still wanted an opportunity to meet with you and invited you to come meet with our Executive Boards at their regular meeting at the beginning of December. Again, rather than talking to us directly, you had the County Administrator contact us to tell us that you would not come to the meeting, stating that you wanted to remain "independent." We would note that over the years many elected officials from the county have met with our organizations without endangering their independence in any way.

We find both your public statements and your treatment of the representatives of our organizations troubling. CEA and CAESS represent the 1,981 employees of the school system, all of whom are hard at work every day to make Calvert students the most successful they can possibly be. Further, CEA and CAESS supported your candidacy and worked hard for your election when you ran for office two years ago. We would note that you had no problem meeting with us while you were seeking teacher endorsement and support and were a regular fixture at our office as you sought teacher and support staff votes.

Regarding the issue of restorative steps in the new four-year teacher contract, you are well aware that for too many years Calvert County has failed to fund teacher's legally negotiated pay steps (as well as steps owed to other county employees, and we support their restoration as well), putting county teachers many steps behind what their contract says they should be paid. You ran for office promising over and over to work to restore those lost steps. In recent years, all the counties surrounding us have been working to put teachers back on step. A few (including St. Mary's County) have restored their teachers to the pay their contracts say they should be receiving. Others are at least closing the gap and fully funding their contracts.

Calvert County has not restored any lost teacher pay steps putting teachers far behind what their contract says they are supposed to be paid and far behind other counties across the state. You also well know, but have not mentioned in any of your public statements, that this has led to incredible Calvert County teacher flight to other counties where they can earn what the contract says they should be paid. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, 46 Calvert teachers left our schools to teach elsewhere. We do not have that number for last school year, but we can tell you that the county was forced to hire over 80 new teachers to fill the classrooms of those who left.

According to Calvert County Public Schools, it costs our system approximately \$40,000 to train a new teacher over their first three years of employment. If 100 teachers then leave to teach in other counties that are fully funding their contracts, that represents a \$4 million dollar loss to the county, an amount that doubles when the county is forced to pay to train the new teachers who replace those who've left. Commissioner Hart, you often talk about fiscal responsibility in your public statements. We ask you sir, how is this wasted drain on the county school budget fiscally responsible?

A major responsibility of both the Board of Education and the County Commissioners (as the funding body for county schools) is retaining good employees to teach in Calvert County classrooms. If, as appears to be the case, over ten percent of our teachers have fled the county in the last two years, our elected government representatives are failing woefully at that responsibility. The Board of Education has accepted this reality and negotiated with county schools employees in good faith a four-year contract which includes two restorative steps, not nearly enough to restore our teachers to the pay their contract says they should be receiving, but a good faith effort to encourage our very good teachers to stay. We now turn to you and the other county commissioners to fund the contract to stop the flight of Calvert County trained teachers to neighboring counties who are more than happy to hire them.

Commissioner Hart, these issues, which will affect the educational success of Calvert County's young people well into the future, are far too important for the personal concerns of either of our Boards or you to get in the way of the BOCC communicating with the representatives of the teachers and classified employees of the Calvert County Public Schools. The CEA and CAESS Executive Boards stand ready to meet with you, to meet with any other member of the County Commission, or to meet with the budget staff of the county administration regarding funding of the legally negotiated and ratified four-year teacher and support staff contracts.

If anyone is willing to meet with us, we will bring the pizza.

Sincerely,

–Calvert Education Association Executive Board

Dennis Mooney, president; Dona Ostenso, vice president; Christine Bennett, Gary Clites, Deanna Coughlin, Amy Cox, Nancy Crosby, Carol Howard, teacher members; Pamela Mackall, retired teacher member.

–Calvert Association of Educational Support Staff Executive Board

Amelia Jeffries, president; Marvin Stewart, vice president; Alice Brooks, Babby Brooks, Jean Ramos, Brenda Savoy, Angela Stuart, Jacqueline Wall, Crystal Weems, board members.

