

## 45 Residents Chat with Fattman, Fernandes

By Kevin Rudden  
Staff Reporter/Columnist

About 45 people from Milford and surrounding towns gathered in the lower level of the St. Mary's Parish Hall on September 17 to talk to State Senator Ryan Fattman (R Webster) and State Senator John Fernandes (D. Milford) about their concerns. The event was sponsored by Citizens for Milford, whose co-chair, John Seaver, told those gathered, "This is all about you, the citizens having access."

Questions and concerns were far-ranging, from what a typical day for a legislator is like, to sound barriers along Route I-495, to protecting Milford's environment, to the English Language Learners (ELL) program. Both legislators said there is no "typical day," but both cited long days that include answering hundreds of e-mails from constituents, meeting with officials from the communities they serve, and meetings at the State House.

Fattman and Fernandes received thanks for their work from Milford resident Michael Visconti and Selectman William Buckley. He thanked the legislators for securing dollars to help pay for local projects.

Both the senator and representative said they opposed the Trust Act, which lets communities create sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants, with their opposition centering on provisions preventing local law enforcement officials from communicating with state and federal law enforcement agencies about a person's status.

Fattman and Fernandes also talked about the natural gas pipeline proposed to go through the area. "I do think we need to get more gas into the state" for power plants, Fernandes said, but noted plans are preliminary at this point. Fattman said the planned pipeline's 25,000 cubic feet per day capacity is "very small" compared to other proposed pipelines. "We need to make sure we do our due diligence," he noted.

Fernandes spent some time answering a question about the ELL program, noting that 90 percent to 95 percent of the ELL students in Milford are either United States citizens or have legal visas to be here. State aid for ELL students lags by one year, since the state looks at school enrollment in the past year when calculating aid for this year, he said. Fernandes also noted that Milford's ELL enrollment is less than other communities'. For example, he said Lynn had to deal with 600 ELL students in one year – the equivalent of a new school building.

Fattman also addressed the issue, saying the ELL student population is projected to be one of every three students by the year 2030. The Blackstone-Millville school district experienced a 30 percent jump in ELL students in one year, he noted.

Other issues discussed included requested increases in home insurance rates, identifying genetically modified food ingredients, early childhood education and mental health issues. Seaver asked why State House committee meetings are not televised.

To that question, Fernandes noted, "There's a history to this and old habits die hard." Both he and Fattman talked about the need for legislators to have a "safe environment" to speak freely about issues as well as the confidential nature of constituents' personal communications that may be discussed.

Another question posed was how the two legislators feel about state funding for Planned Parenthood. Both replied that – to their knowledge – the state gives that organization no funding.