DiNapoli, state team to begin audit in early October

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State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli has agreed to conduct an audit of the Rochester City School District’s finances in light of its recent budgetary disaster, state Assemblyman Harry Bronson said.

Bronson said he spoke with DiNapoli Monday evening, after Bronson, state Sen. Rich Funke and other public officials called for various forms of state investigation.

“He (DiNapoli) says it’s very important to get answers as quickly as possible, so he’s going to get his team together,” Bronson said. Jennifer Freeman, communications director for the Office of the State Comptroller said in a statement: “Given the serious nature of this matter, auditors will be redirect- ed from other projects and will begin this work in early October. During the course of the audit, which will take several months to complete, the office will not comment on specifics until the audit is complete,” RCSD’s own financial team was scrambling Tuesday to complete a preliminary review and present findings to Superintendent Terry Dade, who is still out of town at a state conference. Chief Financial Officer Everton Sewell has returned from his own personal absence.

For its part, the state Education Department said in a statement: “The Department is in contact with district officials to help assess the financial situation and determine appropriate next steps.”

In a Tuesday afternoon press conference, Mayor Lovely Warren said she wants the state to split the city and school district so that city residents aren’t hurt by “someone else’s mistakes or challenges.”

“My support for our children hasn’t changed,” she said. “This is just an issue that impacts us financially that I want that burden to be taken off of our taxpayers and the responsibility to lie where it’s supposed to, and that is with the state, because that is what the courts have said.”

Warren was referring to the city’s recent loss in state court in attempting to place a referendum on school district governance on the November ballot. RCSD successfully argued the city was overstating its statutory power relative to education.

If RCSD were divorced from city government, the most immediate question would be how it would raise revenue.

When asked her opinion, Warren said: “Let the state take responsibility for what the courts said that they need to take responsibility for.”