
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

“The Committee will receive testimony from members of the public regarding the ‘School Funding Reform Act of 2008,’ P.L.2007, c.260, and other matters related to education funding in the State”

LOCATION: Camden County Technical Schools
Sicklerville, New Jersey

DATE: February 7, 2017
6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Marlene Caride, Chair
Assemblywoman Angelica M. Jimenez
Assemblywoman Patricia Egan Jones
Assemblywoman Angela V. McKnight
Assemblywoman Gabriela M. Mosquera
Assemblyman Adam J. Taliaferro
Assemblyman Robert Auth



ALSO PRESENT:

Adrian Crook
Allen T. Dupree
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides

Nicole Brown
Assembly Majority
Committee Aide

Natalie Ghaul
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

STEPHEN M. SWEENEY
Chair

JOSEPH PENNACCHIO
Vice-Chair

SANDRA B. CUNNINGHAM
MICHAEL J. DOHERTY
STEVEN V. OROHO
M. TERESA RUIZ
PAUL A. SARLO
SAMUEL D. THOMPSON



New Jersey State Legislature
SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
SCHOOL FUNDING FAIRNESS
STATE HOUSE ANNEX
PO BOX 068
TRENTON NJ 08625-0068

ALLEN T. DUPREE
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide
(609) 847-3850
(609) 984-9808 fax

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Senate Select Committee on School Funding Fairness will hold a public hearing on Thursday, February 2, 2017 at 11:00 AM in The Parkview Room, West Hall, Middlesex County College, 2600 Woodbridge Avenue, Edison, New Jersey 08837.

The committee will receive testimony from invited guests and from members of the public on inequities in school funding in New Jersey.

The public may address comments and questions to Allen T. Dupree, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Marguerite Tazza, Secretary, at (609)847-3850 or fax (609)984-9808. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

Persons wishing to testify should register with the Office of Legislative Services at (609) 847-3850 and should submit 15 copies of written testimony on the day of the hearing. Oral testimony will be limited to three minutes. Persons who are not presenting oral testimony may submit 15 copies of written testimony for consideration by the committee and inclusion in the record.

Issued 1/26/17

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Barry Wright Mayor Winslow Township	4
Scott Kipers Business Administrator Camden County Technical School District	5
Gregory Cappello, Esq. Principal Gloucester Township Campus Camden County Vocational School District	7
Carmen G. Rodriguez Freeholder Camden County	9
Peter E. Castellano, Esq. Member Board of Education Egg Harbor Township School District	11
Justin A. Riggs Member Board of Education Egg Harbor Township School District	13
Kathryn Bay Judge Member Board of Education Cherry Hill School District, and Vice President Garden State Coalition of Schools	15
Paul Medany Mayor Deptford Township	18
Betsy McBride Mayor Pennsauken Township	18

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Christopher Benedetto Chair Cherry Hill Parents for Fair Funding	25
C. Dan Blachford, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools Hammonton Public Schools	27
Patricia L. Haney Superintendent of Schools Logan Township School District	29
Nick Kappatos Mayor Borough of Runnemede	33
Ronald C. Brady Regional Director Freedom Prep Charter School, and President Board of Trustees New Jersey Charter Schools Association	36
Annette Castiglione Superintendent of Schools Bellmawr Public School District	39
Steven Robbins Representing Cherry Hill Parents for Fair Funding	43
Lori L. Moore, Ed.D. Superintendent Lindenwold Public School District	45
Kathleen Huder Business Administrator Lindenwold Public School District	47

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Patricia A. Calandro Chief Academic Officer Kingsway Regional and South Harrison Township Elementary School Districts	48
James J. Lavender, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools Kingsway Regional and South Harrison Township Elementary School Districts	48
Jennifer Cavallaro-Fromm Parent Swedesboro-Woolwich School District	48
Jason Schimpf Business Administrator Kingsway Regional School District	57
Patrick J. McAleer, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools Pitman Public Schools	66
Lynn DiPietropolo Chief School Administrator Clementon Elementary School	70
Gary Passanante Mayor Borough of Somerdale	73
Shawn Miles Parent Advocate Parents for Great Camden Schools	73
Desmond Benson Parent Advocate Parents for Great Camden Schools	73
Rita Romeu Committeewoman Chesterfield Township	76

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Joseph Campisi, Ed.D. Assistant Superintendent K-12 Cherry Hill Public School District	80
Cody Miller Councilman Township of Monroe	82
Mark Schonewise Member Board of Education East Greenwich Township Schools	84
Charles Buchheim Vice President Board of Education Runnemede School District, and Member Camden County Educational Services Commission	86
James Mueller President Board of Education Kingsway Regional School District	91
Jorden Schiff, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools Hillsborough Township Public Schools, and President Garden State Coalition of Schools, and Chair Legislative Committee New Jersey Association of School Administrators	93
Sue Altman Private Citizen	102
G. Kennedy Greene, Ed.D. Superintendent Newton Public Schools	108

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Karen Chew Council President Chesilhurst Borough, and Teacher Gloucester Township Public Schools	111
APPENDIX	
Testimony submitted by Scott Kipers	1x
Testimony submitted by Greg Cappello	3x
Testimony submitted by Peter E. Castellano, Esq., Justin A. Riggs, Frederick P. Nickles, Chandra D. Anaya	5x
Testimony submitted by Kathryn Bay Judge	9x
Information Sheets submitted by Paul Medany	10x
Testimony, plus attachments submitted by Christopher Benedetto	13x
Testimony submitted by Patricia L. Haney	75x
Testimony submitted by Ronald C. Brady	77x

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

APPENDIX (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Testimony submitted by Steven Robbins	79x
Testimony, plus attachments submitted by Lori L. Moore, Ed.D.	80x
Testimony submitted by Patricia Calandro	86x
Testimony submitted by James J. Lavender, Ed.D.	88x
Testimony submitted by Jason Schimpf	90x
Testimony submitted by Patrick J. McAleer, Ed.D.	93x
Testimony submitted by Lynn DiPietropolo	94x
Testimony submitted by Rita Romeu	96x
Testimony submitted by Joseph Campisi, Ed.D.	98x
Testimony submitted by Jorden Schiff, Ed.D.	100x

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MARLENE CARIDE (Chair): Good evening, everyone.

Before we begin our hearing, we in the Assembly, in the Committee for Education, want to take the opportunity to not only thank our hosts, but also to present the parents and our school year with a resolution.

Because the month of February is Career and Technical Education Month. And I was joking with one of the members from the school here, and they were saying that, “Vocational school is not my Grandpa’s vocational school.” (laughter) And it’s true. What we knew vocational school to be when we were younger has changed, and the competitiveness of vocational school is fascinating. And I’ve had my share of visiting schools, and every time I go see a school -- a vocational school, I walk out of there amazed and think, “Why wasn’t that there when I was a child and I was studying?”

So I want to present this to our beautiful hosts.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much for having us here this evening.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much for accommodating us, and thank you for all the work that you do for our students. (applause)

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Can you get the parents to speak?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Could we get one of the parents? Come on over here; come on up.

Adam, come on up.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Here he is; I get to hug him.
(laughter)

ALL: Thank you very much; thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Good evening, everyone.
Thank you very much for joining us here this evening.

We are the members of the Committee of Education; and as you're aware, we've been holding different public hearings throughout the State of New Jersey to get your voice, and your suggestions, and your opinions with regard to the school funding formula.

Again, as I've said in several of our public hearings, we're not looking to dismantle what we have; we're looking to improve it and make it work, because all of our towns are feeling the pain. And we need to figure out a way to help our students, because what really counts here are the children; taxpayers as well. And we have to find a way to make the formula fair so that our taxpayers have a little bit less of a burden every year; but, at the same time, we don't compromise the quality or the education that we're all so proud of that we've been giving our children.

We have a long list of individuals who want to testify before us. And so what we've done is -- we have a three-minute window for everyone. Because we want to make sure that we're able to hear from everyone. We have the location until 9:00 p.m. So what we're going to do is -- 30 seconds before, the sign will go up. (indicates) (laughter) So as you're speaking, just look up from time to time, to make sure you're not getting the warning.

We have been very successful in getting through our meetings and having everyone be heard. And I am sure that we'll be able to do that again this evening.

If you have any written material that you want to present to us, please do so; that will be part of the record. It will be preserved and it will be part of the record. Please do not read it; summarize it for us, because we will have your written statement afterwards.

But again, we are looking forward to hearing from you, and we will be taking back all of your suggestions and all of your concerns.

So I thank you for taking the time to come out this evening to speak with us, to address this serious issue with us.

On that note, I am going to pass this over to Assemblywoman Mosquera, who-- Thank you very much for welcoming us into your District.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: Yes, thank you.

Good evening.

I just want to extend my gratitude to the Chairwoman for hosting this public hearing, here, in Gloucester Township. So to the Committee, welcome to Gloucester Township, formally.

Mayor David Mayer would have been here, but he's feeling under the weather. And I know that he also extends his welcome, and thank you for being here.

And then I also just wanted to point out, the Mayor of Winslow is here, Barry Wright, who would like to come up and say a few words -- if that's okay with the Chairwoman -- just to welcome everybody and to say a few things. Is that all right?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Do we know how many mayors are out there?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: Yes. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: There are a lot of mayors who would all like to have a few words. (laughter)

Come ahead, Mr. Wright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, please -- please sit down.

MAYOR BARRY WRIGHT: If I could-- And Winslow Township is right on the other side of this road. So we welcome you as well to this area--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for having us.

MAYOR WRIGHT: --and very happy to be members of the 4th Legislative District.

I would just like to say, on behalf of Winslow Township, concerning this particular issue -- and my Superintendent, Dr. [Major Poteat](#), could not be here this evening -- but we are a Township School District of approximately 5,000 students. We do have issues right now; it's been flat-funded for the last couple of years. And we've been able to maintain some of the wonderful programs we have. We do have a high amount of special ed students; a lot of that because we have such an excellent special ed program in Winslow.

We have also an excellent early intervention program, which my 4-year-old grandson is able to enjoy -- who has some autistic issues in his life.

But to continue those programs to see -- we're striving now to have a pre-K for all students, no matter what their income, within Winslow Township. It's essential for us, to continue these very valuable programs, that the funding at least stay flat, but not be decreased in any way. Our survival as a viable school district -- providing an excellent education for everybody, no matter what their income -- it's just essential that you really take that into consideration.

And that's our plea here this evening, on behalf of Winslow.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, thank you so much; thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thanks, Mayor.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Next, we'll have Scott Kipers and Gregory Cappello, who are our hosts this evening.

Please.

If I mispronounce your last name, please forgive me.

S C O T T K I P E R S: That's fine.

Yes, if I corrected everybody on the mispronunciation of my name, I'd be doing it a lot.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Well, how do you pronounce it?

MR. KIPERS: Kipers (indicating pronunciation); Kipers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Kipers; there you go. Thank you. (laughter)

MR. KIPERS: All right. First of all, I just want to welcome everybody here to Camden County Technical Schools. We're thrilled to have -- to be able to host this legislative hearing.

We appreciate that-- Well, first of all, I guess I should say, I'm Scott Kipers; I'm the Business Administrator here at the school. We appreciate that the Legislature takes such an interest in public education, and is examining school funding in such a comprehensive manner.

The Camden County Technical Schools serve more than 2,000 students at two campuses. Like other county vocational-technical school districts, we have a unique mission -- which is to integrate career-focused technical training with academic instruction and extracurricular experiences, so students will be prepared for careers, as well as college.

Our costs are higher than traditional high schools, due to the additional teachers, supplies, and equipment for our extensive array of career programs. We must continually update these programs to keep them aligned with industry standards and emerging employer need, so that our students will be ready for success in the workforce.

Like many districts, Camden County has struggled with stagnant funding for the past seven years. Not only has our State funding remained relatively flat, but so has our portion of our funding provided by the Freeholder Board. Unlike local districts, we simply do not have the ability to increase our tax levy by 2 percent every year. We charge local districts a relatively modest tuition as their local share, and we know that increasing their cost to send students to us is a last resort, and one that would likely result in decreased enrollment.

We appreciate that the Legislature is committed to finding solutions to the funding problems; and we know that it is not easy, given the State's current fiscal situation. And we applaud the effort you are making to engage stakeholders and consider a variety of solutions.

On behalf of the students and staff of Camden County Technical Schools, I ask that you keep in mind the important role of career and technical education, and the special funding challenges of county-based schools that do not control their local tax levy.

As a relatively lower-wealth county with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students, Camden County Technical Schools would be devastated by the Governor's non-equalized funding proposal, which does not recognize the high cost of vocational programs, or the intensive educational needs of our students. Rather, we urge the Legislature to move towards a restoration of the enrollment-based funding under the School Funding Reform Act, which will help us keep pace with the rising costs and emerging workforce needs in Camden County. In doing so, we ask you to avoid any aid reductions for county vocational schools, which lack the ability to replace lost aid with local tax levy aid. We do not want well-intentioned funding reallocations to end up increasing costs for local districts and possibly limiting opportunities for students to attend vocational school districts.

Again, thank you for making the trip to Camden County, and for your continued support of New Jersey's county vocational-technical schools.

Mr. Cappello.

GREGORY CAPPELLO, Esq.: Thank you, Mr. Kipers.

Good evening.

My name is Greg Cappello; I'm the Principal here, at the Gloucester Township Campus of Camden County Technical Schools.

I really want to thank you, on behalf of our students and our parents, some of whom I believe you've met tonight.

As Mr. Kipers said, we're a little bit different from other schools, but we're not immune to the difficulties with budgets that schools have. And we're looking to continue our mission; our students are successful by every measure that the State of New Jersey asks of us. Our students are successful, we're continuing with that mission. But as our funding has remained stagnant, it becomes more and more challenging for us to meet the mission that we have, which is to get our students to great careers and great colleges.

It's what we do, it's what we're going to continue to do. But what we're asking is for the support that we've always had. Your group has always been a driving force in education in this state. And our state is the best that there is in this country. We want to remain that way, we want to continue to do our mission.

So we thank you for continuing to support us and bring forth further funding.

Thank you very much for coming out here tonight.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for having us.

Thank you.

Assemblywoman, you wanted to acknowledge something?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm the one who never follows the right order; I don't know why. (laughter)

But anyway, I would like to introduce two of my Mayors from the 5th District, very close by. First, Mayor Medany from Deptford Township -- and I think somebody from Deptford will be talking to us about their issues; and the Mayor of Runnemede, Mayor Kappatos, who has joined us tonight. We're all concerned about this issue.

And further and, in fact, very important to this campus is Freeholder Carmen Rodriguez. Please stand and let everybody say "thank you" for what a wonderful vocational program we have. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Freeholder, do you wish to address the floor?

F R E E H O L D E R C A R M E N G. R O D R I G U E Z: (off mike) Yes, I would like to, please.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please.

FREEHOLDER RODRIGUEZ: First of all, let me thank you for choosing Camden County Technical Schools as the place where you will speak. This is our pride and our joy in the County.

I want to thank everyone who is present here to speak.

As a Freeholder in Camden County, I am liaison to this technical school, for which I am very proud. And we do work very hard to make sure that we give our children every possible opportunity to be successful. This is not just college readiness; this is life readiness -- what we work towards in this school.

As liaison to the County Superintendents also, every school district in our 37 towns is important to me; and making sure that all of the

children throughout Camden County receive the appropriate funding and resources that they need to get a first-class, 21st century education in a world that is heading towards a global economy, and possibly receiving additional challenges. As we move forward with changes happening, possibly, at the Federal level, it is ever more important that we make sure that the funding formula has to be looked at carefully; that no district is just completely slaughtered and loses a significant amount of money. We do not want to see that happen to any of these; Camden County has a lot of small school districts where even the slightest shifts could have severe impact in their capacity to offer services.

And I know, for a fact, that they are all working collaboratively to try to make things more efficient and more effective. They do a lot of collaborative work, so I know that they've been working very hard for many years now to maintain their budgets as low as possible. So it would be very devastating for our children down here if any of these schools saw a severe drop in the funding. And I ask that you please consider each of these situations individually, so that the formula is a reflection of the populations that it serves.

We do have some schools that have very high special education costs associated with them. We have other schools -- for example, the school district in which I work -- which has a rather large bilingual population; in addition to a very large special education community that requires additional services, that requires a very-difficult-to-recruit teaching staff to be able to provide appropriate services -- services that are mandated to be provided. And we want to make sure that these children do get these services.

So I ask that you please consider all of these aspects -- the difficulty of recruiting appropriately certified staff to provide our children with the best quality education. Because these are our future leaders, and if we do not resource them properly now, it will be a very bleak future for us.

So I ask that you please use caution; we have many small towns that require gentle care. And I ask that you consider that.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

Next, we'll call Pete Castellano; and also Justin Riggs.

Welcome, gentlemen; and thank you.

PETER E. CASTELLANO, Esq.: (off mike) Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Chairman Caride and members of the Committee, on behalf of the Egg Harbor Township School District, we are testifying today to bring to your attention our desperate situation with regard to State aid.

I have with me, to my left, Justin Riggs; who is also a Board member, who will be speaking. We also have our Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Fred Nickles; as well as our Business Administrator, Ms. Chandra Anaya.

As a District located in a Pinelands Regional Growth Area, the State Pinelands Commission dictates the amount of residential growth in our Township. During boom times in our region, between 2000 and 2007, our Township was forced to grow from 30,000 to 40,000 residents, and our District was forced to grow by over 2,000 students. At the same time, caps placed on budget and aid growth, coupled with years of flat State aid,

simply did not allow us to keep pace with this growth. The Egg Harbor Township School District has lost over \$250 million in State aid since 2000, due to caps, freezes, and flat-out cuts in State aid.

Egg Harbor Township paid a price for the economic boom of the local economy in the early-to-mid 2000s; however, Egg Harbor Township is now bearing the brunt of a persistent regional recession. Current casino closures have severely impacted Egg Harbor Township residents. Atlantic County has the highest foreclosure rate in the nation, at 3.3 percent, and an unemployment rate of 7.1 percent. Egg Harbor Township currently has 951 properties in some phase of foreclosure.

This year our District had \$27 million in State aid withheld. Our State aid, according to the formula, should have been \$67 million; instead, we received \$40 million. This difference has to be made up by the property taxpayers. Our Township residents have been faced with large property tax increases for most of the past decade-and-a-half, with no end in sight. In 2000, State aid was approximately 60 percent of our budget; now, it's approximately 35 percent. We have no choice but to go to cap every year, while simultaneously making budget cuts and reducing educational services for our students.

We spend our funds wisely; by every measure, we are near the bottom of districts, according to the DOE's *Taxpayers' Guide for Education Spending*. Our current budget is \$8 million below State adequacy.

One final issue: Please don't require us to pay back part of our aid in the form of an EDA assessment.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'll turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Riggs.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

JUSTIN A. RIGGS: Good evening.

Thank you for having this forum this evening.

As Mr. Castellano stated, my name is Justin Riggs; I'm a current Board member on the Egg Harbor Township Board of Education. I'm also a graduate -- proud graduate of our school district, who now serves on the Board.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mr. Riggs, if you could just put the mike a little closer. I want to make sure everyone can hear you in the back.

MR. RIGGS: Better?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

MR. RIGGS: Sorry.

Because of the gross underfunding that Mr. Castellano has stated, we have teachers putting together lessons without the proper tools needed to teach our students to the increasingly higher standards; and that simply isn't fair.

Our District is the neighboring district to Atlantic City; and currently we have roughly 7,000 more residents than Atlantic City. That brings a host of problems, and going down this road is unhealthy and unsustainable for our residents.

Because of this gross underfunding, we are even struggling to provide a healthy and safe environment for our students, as our Business Administrator had talked about previously at one of our Finance meetings. We have an exhaust system that needs to be replaced; we currently don't have the funds to do that because of the underfunding to us.

As I said, we need to fix this issue because we can't continue to kick this down the road any more.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Does anyone have any questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Just a comment.

I think I read -- it was your District that let the public know you couldn't have an all-day kindergarten program because of the lack of funding -- which you were trying to put in place.

MR. RIGGS: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Do you any pre-kindergarten programs?

MR. CASTELLANO: Only handicapped--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Handicapped.

MR. CASTELLANO: --and a very limited lottery for an inclusion. But full-day kindergarten-- Obviously, full-day kindergarten is something we desperately would like to add, as well as pre-K, because we know those are proven winners. They are things that help students succeed. We can't even think about adding programs. The budget that's in front of us for next year is going to be a complete disaster, and it looks like we'll have to be cutting \$6 million from the current budget, while going to cap--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: While going to cap.

MR. CASTELLANO: -- just to try to stay with -- maintain the programs we have.

But yes, absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Anyone else? (no response)
Thank you so much, gentlemen, for sharing your thoughts with us.

MR. CASTELLANO: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Just real quick: We have a list of individuals who had signed up, so we're going to be going through that list. And once we finish with that list, then I believe that there's a sign-up sheet in the back. We'll try to get through that as well.

So again, if you have any written material that you would like to provide to us, please do so. I ask that you not read from that material so that we can accommodate everyone, or almost everyone here in the room.

But thank you.

Next, we'll call Kathryn Judge.

Good evening; and welcome.

KATHRYN BAY JUDGE: Good evening; thank you very much.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee.

My name is Kathryn Judge from Cherry Hill, the 12th-largest District in New Jersey. And I am grateful for the opportunity to be here today to shed some light on our lack of funding in our District.

I also sit on the Garden State Coalition of Schools' Executive Board. And I am certain, in your travels around the state, that you will hear many stories from Garden State districts on this topic.

We were faced with some very difficult decisions when the Governor confiscated \$3.2 million from our fund balance in 2010, and slashed our budget. Today, we do not receive what we received in 2009,

even though many other school districts have been brought back to, at least, the 2009 budget levels.

For the last decade, we have focused our energies on maintaining low class size and instruction for the children of our District. We have concentrated resources in our classrooms. We have cut spending on professional development, and reduced stipends in each sport and club. However, at the middle school level, sports are now restricted to approximately 20 children per sport. There is no money to do anything other than that. Previously, there were no cuts in Cherry Hill at the middle school level.

The average age of our 19 buildings is 50 years old, and working space is limited. Our current budget severely restricts maintenance efforts. We would need to do a multimillion-dollar referendum just for black top for those 19 schools.

Some of our AP classes, at both East and West High School -- there are 41 children sitting in the classroom. Our classrooms were not built to hold 41 desks. Some of the kids sit on the floor and hope that there is somebody absent that day so they can have a seat.

We do not offer full-day kindergarten. We don't have the money for staffing, and we don't have the space. If there is ever a mandate that we must offer full-day kindergarten, it will not be in the traditional sense of home elementary schools because we do not have the space.

At one time, Cherry Hill was a District Factor Group of IJ. When they were analyzed last, we are now GH. Even that designation no longer accurately reflects our District. Of our 19 schools, a third are Title I schools. In those six buildings, 1 in 3 children are eligible for free and

reduced lunch; that's 33 percent. Eighty-one percent of our budget is from our local taxpayers; 81 percent.

In closing, Cherry Hill is no longer the wealthy or affluent school district it once was, and that the local media continues to refer to us as.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in front of you today. And I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Does anyone have any questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: No, but I can't miss thanking you for being here. My new life as a grandmother-- Besides being a member of this Committee, I have two grandchildren in the Cherry Hill schools, so I am very interested -- and mostly interested in how we're limiting the sports programs in middle schools--

MS. JUDGE: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --which is truly unfortunate. Because I have a granddaughter who wants to be very active, and can't always make that number 20.

MS. JUDGE: That's one of the things we hear complaints about an awful lot.

I failed to mention that I'm a Board member in Cherry Hill; I'm here representing the Cherry Hill School Board.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

Next, we'll call Mayor McBride and Mayor -- I'm sorry -- Medany (indicating pronunciation).

MAYOR PAUL MEDANY: (off mike) Medany (indicating pronunciation).

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please.

Is Mayor McBride present?

MAYOR MEDANY: This is written testimony that I'm not-- It's from the school district. Can I give that to you?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay, absolutely.

Would you like to say a few words, Mayor?

MAYOR MEDANY: Yes, I do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please.

MAYOR MEDANY: Of course.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor McBride? Welcome.

MAYOR MEDANY: Hi, Mayor; how are you?

Ladies first.

MAYOR BETSY McBRIDE: No, thank you. (laughter) Go ahead.

Go ahead; I'm serious.

MAYOR MEDANY: I'm first? Okay.

So I'm Mayor Paul Medany from Deptford Township, approximately 32,000 residents. Our School Superintendent is here, Dr. Ford. I'm going to speaking on the school district's behalf, because I think you folks should be hearing from more mayors about this problem -- because, of course, it directly affects the tax base in towns; and good schools mean good towns. And, you know, I know that more than anybody. I

mean, you know, we do -- we think we do a very good job at the Township level with finances, but we want folks to move to our town and stay in our town. And we want them there because of the schools.

The school funding issue directly affects us. And there are things like -- Deptford Township just went out for a bond issues to improve the physical plant of the school because the school district -- the Administration has to put their dollars into the classroom. They have to put it in the teachers' salaries, etc. You all know that story.

So the physical plants of the schools have suffered. We go out for -- or, the school district goes out for bond referendums, and they get shot down because no taxpayer in the State of New Jersey is going to voluntarily vote to raise their taxes. So the physical plants of the schools, in Deptford Township, are now suffering because of this.

And I'm sure-- Look, I know I have three minutes; I'm waiting for that sign to go up. (laughter)

But really, I know you folks are going to travel across the state, probably, and hear, really, the same story. You're going to hear from the folks like us; Deptford Township is \$10 million underfunded. That's a huge amount of money. And then you're going to hear from the folks who are overfunded, who want to keep their dollars.

So, you know, there are both sides to this story; I get that. But at the end of the day, we have to make a decision. We're elected -- this is a representative republic; this is the way I look at it. Folks elect me; and they elect you to make decisions. You can go across this whole state and hear from every school superintendent, every resident -- and there are residents

who are going to be up here -- every school teacher; and everybody is going to say the same thing. You can close your eyes in any town in the state.

But the bottom line is, we have to get fairness to this. And the fairness-- And I've been trying to follow this, and I'm trying to do my homework. There is a Senate plan up there that's going to inject money into it. And all we really have to do is do the Senate plan: Get the \$100 million a year into this thing. You're never going to fund the SFRA fully. There are only so many dollars in the checkbook. And the State's basically broke; I'm not telling you guys anything -- the pension funds, everything else; we don't have money coming in. So we have to fund it, and fund it fairly. We can't-- There are districts in Gloucester County that are 140 percent overfunded; we're 75 percent underfunded. That's not fair when they're my next-door neighbor; I don't get that.

So you have the ability to do it. And me, as a Mayor and an elected official, I'm asking you to do that. I don't know if-- Oh, I have 30 seconds; I wanted to tell you a story. That's not fair. (laughter)

So anyway, really-- My last 15 seconds are pleas-- And I really believe that; I tell Fitz that all the time. We're elected to lead; not everybody has a voice, and we're their voice. And, you know, we need to make the hard decisions. Please make the hard decision here.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, if I may.

You're absolutely right about the fact that residents in the town will not vote to tax themselves more. We just recently -- I'm from Richfield--

MAYOR MEDANY: Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --in New Jersey, north New Jersey. And we just recently had a referendum, and the vote was against it--

MAYOR MEDANY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --because we don't want to increase our taxes. And I understand; we have to be fair to all of the taxpayers.

While I know the Senate Bill that you referenced -- in that particular Bill it calls for a Task Force. I know there has been talk about, perhaps, there being some kind of way that we can do something to make a fairness -- make it fair across the board for everybody. But right now we're talking about a Task Force Bill that we have in both houses. But we are working on it; and that's the purpose of this public hearing, that we've been taking throughout the state to hear.

And you're right; we do need to hear from our mayors, and our councilmembers, because there is a burden on you.

MAYOR MEDANY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: How do you make it work for the taxpayers in your town and not sacrifice the wonderful education that you may be famous for?

MAYOR MEDANY: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: So thank you very much for being here this evening.

MAYOR MEDANY: Thanks for listening to me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, the floor is yours.

MAYOR McBRIDE: Thank you.

MAYOR MEDANY: Thanks.

MAYOR McBRIDE: Betsy McBride, Pennsauken Township.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

It's my understanding that there are three bills that are circulating for school funding. And the Senate Bill that went through and passed the Senate is before the House (*sic*), and it's before this Committee. And it is a school funding formula that follows the pupil, as opposed to the district. And I believe that two of our Assemblypeople -- Pam Lampitt and Lou Greenwald -- are sponsoring that Bill.

There's another bill that has the Task Force, and then there's the Governor's bill that wants flat-funding across the board which is, of course, not fair. And so in Pennsauken, our District struggles and is-- During the Abbott districts funding, Camden would get a lot of money per pupil, and Pennsauken -- even though they had a great many kids on free and reduced lunch -- was not getting the funding that they were necessarily entitled to.

And under Corzine's Administration, they got some funding; they got a bump of about \$18 million, and then it went flat from there.

We have 70 percent of our student population on free and reduced lunch; we have 20 percent special needs; we had one child who costs \$100,000 a year to send to another district to be -- to deal with his special needs.

The boost that Pennsauken needs comes from the funding formula that-- I'm sorry, I forget the bill number, but-- And it's, I believe, in Committee, and needs to come out of Committee and onto the floor so that it can be voted on.

I think that fairness is to follow the child, no matter what district they're in. If they're in Deptford, if they're in Atlantic City, if they're in Egg Harbor Township, even if they're in Cherry Hill. I'm surprised to hear the number of kids in Cherry Hill who are on free and reduced lunch. They're a neighboring township. It is an issue that needs to be dealt with, and it has to start with you guys getting it out of Committee.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Mayor.

And again, I know that there have been several discussions out in the public with regards to bills. The Senate and the Assembly have similar bills; and then, of course, there's the Governor, who has been traveling around with a one-size-fits-all; and it doesn't. So we're working on that.

MAYOR McBRIDE: It's not fair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Exactly.

MAYOR McBRIDE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: And again, thank you for joining us this evening.

MAYOR McBRIDE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Just one comment?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: To both mayors -- particularly Mayor Medany's comments about some schools are funded here, (indicates) and others here. Documents that we all were given by a group of Superintendents -- who, God bless them, put a PowerPoint together that is just incredible -- states that 138 school districts in the state are funded at

130 percent, while 239 are below 70 percent. So clearly, this Committee understands that we really better get busy.

There will be places that will lose a few bucks. But we have to be fair; we don't follow growth -- school districts that have grown-- There was a gal from -- not Hunterdon County, but a county in the middle part of the state -- her district grew by 2,000 students; she got no more money. I don't know how anybody is running a school district that's in that 239. You can't keep going back.

The first time I heard about this as an issue, I wasn't yet on the Education Committee -- and it was Woodbury School Superintendent, who has now gone on to a different location -- but he laid it out in no uncertain terms. "I cannot ask my residents to pay more. And if I ask to go over the cap, they'll say no."

So we've been hearing -- this is my fourth hearing on this issue; three with this Committee, and one with the Joint Committee, that my Chairwoman and I both sat on, in Trenton. And it's been an extraordinary voyage across the state with the same messages.

Thank you.

MAYOR MEDANY: Thank you; thanks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you; and thank you for joining us.

MAYOR MEDANY: Thanks for allowing us to speak, and thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Christopher Benedetto

CHRISTOPHER BENEDETTO: (off mike) Here are my 15 copies.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Welcome.

MR. BENEDETTO: Thank you.

What I've also included is a signature of 100 residents of Cherry Hill, who are in our senior community, who are now engaged with our Fair Funding Committee.

I won't read my testimony exactly, but I will paraphrase.

So ladies and gentlemen of the Select Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Chris Benedetto; I'm the Chair of Cherry Hill Parents for Fair Funding. I'm a citizen; I'm not a politician. I started the Fair Funding Committee -- which is now as big as 700 people -- about seven years ago. My eldest and my other two children are still in the District, but my eldest will be graduating this year.

My purpose for testifying here today is to focus on SFRA and the amount owed to Cherry Hill.

So let's play a little game, here. Let's play a game called *Fact or Fiction*, since we live in a post-fact universe now. (laughter)

Cherry Hill is supposed to be getting \$28 million a year, or about \$2,500 per student. That's a fact.

Since 2008, Cherry Hill has only received about \$11.4 million or \$12.9 million in SFRA, or about \$1,200 per student; that's half. Compounded over the last eight years, we've been -- taken out of our

budget \$90 million. I can't put a value on that today; but I know that other districts are getting this money.

Cherry Hill is receiving less funding per student than similar District Factor Groups.

Student graduation rates have been maintained, and so have our standardized test scores.

And last, but not least, Cherry Hill students get iPads, have new high school textbooks, enjoy smoothly paved parking lots, and have all their activity fees, like robotics, paid.

That last one is not true; that's actually Voorhees, Washington Township, East Windsor, Upper Freehold, and other northern and central districts.

So all irony and satire aside, we the parents, and citizens, and district employees -- because we do represent -- some of the folks on our Committee are from the District -- feel, frankly, that you failed us. And what I'm asking you is to not fail us again.

And no one is speaking this truth, because we're afraid of losing what little we get. We know the system is insolvent, but we also know that there are districts that should not be getting more than they do now.

So here's my report card on SFRA, and the three bills, and these hearings.

Let's go down to a 5th grade level.

Days absent: It's been 3,800 days since SFRA was enacted, and 3,800 days since the District Factor Groups have been redone. Without this data, we're frozen in time, and you think that our District looks like it did in 2008.

Cooperates with peers: The three competing solutions are all flawed, and three sponsors -- the Governor, the Assembly, and the Senate -- refuse to talk to each other in a constructive way. I also noticed that the NJEA and the PTA are not represented as key constituencies.

Showing Effort: These meetings definitely show effort. But effort is not lowering my tax bill, raising my adjustment aid, or giving my kids the educational funds that other kids in the state are getting. I see no clear path right now as to how the money I've sent to Trenton will result in dollars for my kids.

So in conclusion, the 700 members in Cherry Hill of our Fair Funding group are asking you to fully fund SFRA for Cherry Hill, or find an alternative.

The time to act is now -- to fully fund it as designed, or scrap the model. We literally can't wait any longer.

Thank you for allowing us to testify.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for joining us.

Before you leave, any questions? (no response)

Thank you very much.

Next, we'll call Dan Blachford.

Did I pronounce that correctly? (no response)

Mr. Blachford?

C. DAN BLACHFORD, Ed. D.: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Is that correct, the pronunciation?

DR. BLACHFORD: Yes, you got it. It's close enough, realistically. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

That's okay; my last name is Caride, and I've heard a lot of variations of it.

Thank you.

DR. BLACHFORD: I would like to thank you guys for all you've done for New Jersey and for education in New Jersey. It's a spectacular state; I agree with the Camden Tech people. And educationally, we're always in the top four or five in the nation on the National Assessment for Educational Progress.

We do feel that Hammonton is one of the best school districts in the state. I'm Superintendent in Hammonton, and I live in Hammonton.

Our PARCC scores -- we beat our District Factor Group in every category. The Patch Report, that had the best high schools in the state -- we were, about, in the top three in South Jersey; we're very proud of that. We have a 50 percent poverty level.

We have classes that appeal to a broad range of students that include materials classes, 3-D animation graphics classes, and culinary arts. We feel that we are one of the best in the state, and that is saying a lot because it's a very competitive state.

This may come to a screeching halt, though. Every year, we used to get a letter from the Department of Ed stating how much we were underfunded; and it was always, like, \$10 million to \$12 million. In Hammonton, we've made every cut possible. Currently, we have too many children in most of our classes; we are short about 30 teachers and 8

supervisors. Next year we need a Speech teacher. If we hire one, we're going to probably have to lay off a regular education teacher.

We are the lowest spending district in the state category of 3,501 kids and higher. We spend \$11,149 per year, per kid.

The 2 percent cap and the freeze in State funding is severely harming the New Jersey schools. I was talking to a friend, and he's down \$400,000 on next year's budget. In Hammonton, I'm down \$1.2 million right now, and that includes budgeting all the way to cap, using all of my bank cap, and also using health benefit adjustment. We're highly efficient, and we're very effective. And this year, we need extra help; there really are no additional areas for me to cut.

Thank you very much for listening to me.

Do you have any questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Any questions anyone?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: You were pretty clear.

(laughter)

DR. BLACHFORD: Thanks a lot.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for joining us.

Next, we'll call Patricia Haney.

Good evening.

PATRICIA L. HANEY: Good evening.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Welcome.

MS. HANEY: Thank you.

Good evening, members of the Assembly Education Committee.

I am Patricia Haney, Superintendent of the Logan Township School District in Gloucester County.

I wish to speak to the statement found on the *Formula4Success* website, which states that, “When it comes to public schools in New Jersey,” fixing the State funding formula is “simple.”

There is nothing simple about the present situation that all school districts find themselves in today. State funding of schools is not simple.

After attending the Senate Committee held at Kingsway Regional High School on January 27, I quickly realized that that Committee was not focused on reforming school funding. Rather, the Committee’s focus is on comparing districts.

I ask you to be careful about comparing districts. One cannot assume that all over adequacy districts are the same, because some may be over adequacy because the district raised additional funds through its tax levy. Taking funds away from such districts would penalize those towns whose taxpayers showed support for their local schools over the past eight-plus years.

Let me share with you the complexity of how the Senate proposal would affect my District. As a pre-K to 12 District, we include, in our budget, the costs of the tuition for, and transportation of, all of our high school resident students, because we don’t have our own high school in Logan Township. Due to this situation, the proposed School Fairness Funding Act would most likely negatively impact Logan twice.

First, our District stands to have close to \$1 million taken away over the next five years because we have not been a growing district. That would mean that we would lose about \$190,000 each year, which equates to laying off approximately three teachers each year for the next five years.

Second -- this is important -- we would have our high school tuition bill increased, due to the fact that two-thirds of our resident high school students attend, as tuition students, a regional high school, which is a growing district. Because they are listed as a *growing district*, they stand to receive increased State funding as a result of the Fairness Funding Act; which would then result in an increase in their per-pupil cost, because that high school district would be spending more money on their students. Since our tuition bill is calculated based on that per-pupil cost, the receiving high school would then, in turn, increase our tuition bill for each high school student we send to them.

We currently send approximately 270 students to that regional high school. If our tuition bill were to increase by \$1,000 per student, our budget would have to absorb an increase of \$270,000, which would mean four additional teachers would have to be terminated each year, which would decimate our teaching staff.

We are asking that you consider this as you gather your facts and reflect on possible solutions. Some of our solutions would be:

Lift the cap on enrollment growth aid by including additional State aid for those districts.

Cap the annual tuition increase billed by receiving districts to sending districts, similar to the 2 percent cap on tax levy.

Allow districts, like Logan, to have a cap adjustment for tuition increases over 2 percent; or allow a tax cap adjustment to districts, to the extent of the adjustment aid that would be lost.

Fixing the State funding situation will not be simple, and must consider the impact on all districts. Proposing to take funds from school

districts and move those funds to districts which have been underfunded is simply moving funds around and reversing hardship from one set of districts to the other.

I urge this Committee to include finance experts from our school districts to be part of the fact-finding proposal before any solution is finalized.

I appreciate your attention to my situation, and to allowing me to speak this evening.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Superintendent, thank you so much for being here this evening.

And thank you for also making some suggestions to us with regards to the increase of the cap on the growing communities--

MS. HANEY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --and also on the tax levy -- the 2 percent tax levy.

Thank you so much.

MS. HANEY: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Does anyone have any questions? (no response)

Thank you.

Next, we'll call Freeholder Deputy Director Ed McDonnell. (no response)

Is the Freeholder here?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: He's back there. He just wanted to say hello.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Oh, okay. All right.

How about Mayor Nick Kappatos?

MAYOR NICK KAPPATOS: All right; thank you.

You know, I came this evening--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Welcome.

MAYOR KAPPATOS: Welcome; thank you.

I was supposed to be at a Council meeting this evening, and I skipped it to come to this meeting. And I'm actually very glad that I showed up here tonight. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Well, we're glad to have you.

MAYOR KAPPATOS: Thank you.

I'm a little disappointed that more mayors aren't here. I agree; this is an issue that is important to all of us. I concur with everything that the Mayor from Deptford said; he's correct.

I can't claim to know everything that's going on in the school districts -- about the spending. But I will say this. The reason I wanted to speak was to say that, as you know, my issue has always been about getting things done. And so you guys are charged with a very difficult task. And, you know, we are elected officials; we didn't do this job -- hopefully, not to get elected every year; we did it because we wanted to get things done. And so, hopefully the Assembly and the Senate will come up with a plan to get something done.

We're not going to make everybody happy. One of the jobs, as a Mayor and as elected officials, is to say "no" sometimes; and I know it's difficult. We have to take our medicine; we have to get it done.

And so I just want to say that I feel for everyone here. I think this is the most interesting thing I have probably been to. It's much

different than having people yell at you about someone building a fence on the wrong side of a piece of land, (laughter) and being yelled at about trash in a trash can.

But we're a small community; Runnemedede is a little town. I'm a small town Mayor; I can't claim to know what all these other towns are dealing with. But I don't understand why we're all not more engaged in resolving the problems.

So I wish you all luck. You know, once again, we have to do our jobs. So hopefully, you guys will be successful.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, please--

MAYOR KAPPATOS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Go ahead, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Thank you.

You know, Mayor, thank you; thank you all for being here.

As the Assemblywoman for the 32nd District, which is the one that our Speaker comes from also; we represent the same nine towns. And most importantly, as being a mother of an 11-year-old daughter who goes to our school district; she is special needs -- a small IEP issue. Believe me, it's-- We strive; I know I strive -- and I know my colleagues up here -- every day to try to get something done. And myself -- not only as a legislator but, most importantly, as a mom -- understands, more than some people do, how important this is to get this done. That's why we drove two hours here to try to see--

And that's why we're doing this all across the state. You know, Chairwoman, you're doing a phenomenal job; because it's not easy. The

bottom line is, this isn't easy. But we need the suggestions, and that's why we're trying to get this done.

But thank you for being here. And like I said, we are -- it's about getting something done. We do try; I try every day, and I know my colleagues work just as hard as I do.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN TALIAFERRO: Thank you, Mayor; and thank you to all our mayors who are here this evening. You being the Mayor of Runnemede, it hits home for me. I grew up here in Camden County; you know, I grew up in Voorhees. But I pulled out my brother; he's a teacher in Runnemede, and I hear the stories that he tells me from day to day about how they're doing more with less. And you know, it's personal for me not just because it's my brother who teaches in the District; but here in my home District, my friends from Kingsway -- which you know you'll hear a little bit later on about how difficult it is for them to make do with what they're getting right now.

So I just want to thank the Chairwoman, our mayors, and everyone here tonight for everything that you've done to help our students. Because I think, you know, from my perspective, education is the backbone of success and the future. So, you know, I thank my brother for coming out, and for being here, and for what he does; and all the teachers and all our Superintendents. And I think this is a good night to have these types of conversations. They're not easy conversations to have, but I think they're necessary.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN TALIAFERRO: So thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Assemblyman.

Again, Mayor, we are committed. And most of us here, if we don't have children, we have nieces and nephews; and we're taxpayers. So we know how it hurts the pocket, and we know how it hurts the household, also, with regards to the quality of the education.

And we are committed. And we've been traveling throughout the state -- some are going two hours north; some are going two hours south -- but we want to hear what the public has to say, because we do have-- It's a bitter pill, and we have to swallow it.

MAYOR KAPPATOS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: And we do have to work together, and a compromise has to be made. It won't be a good compromise, as far as everybody walking away from the table happy. But we are going to be working on it, and we are committed to it.

So thank you so much for joining us this evening.

MAYOR KAPPATOS: Great; thank you.

Good luck to all of you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Next, we'll have Ronald Brady.

Good evening, Mr. Brady; welcome.

R O N A L D C. B R A D Y: Good evening.

Chairwoman Caride and Committee members, thank you for having me; and good to see many of you again.

My name is Ron Brady; I'm the Regional Director for Freedom Prep Charter School in Camden, and the President of the Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Charter Schools Association.

I also have seven children; five of who have attended or are attending New Jersey charter schools, and one child who is in a regular district school.

Just a little bit about Freedom Prep: 18 percent of our scholars have disabilities; 14 percent of our scholars are English language learners; 93 percent of them receive free or reduced-price lunch.

So the students in our school are, in all respects, students in New Jersey's public schools. We serve a broad spectrum of students in our schools.

As you consider the funding of schools in the State of New Jersey, there are three key factors that we would like you to keep in mind.

The first is that charter school students are public school students. While this is the case, at the present time, the students in my school -- and in many charter schools throughout the state -- receive approximately 70 percent of the per-pupil funding allocation of their district peers. That's not the original 90 percent that the Legislature envisioned when it started charter schools. But because of the way the funding formula has worked out, over time, it is now at about that 70 percent level, and we seek to have it brought back to that 90 percent level. If you want to take it to 100 percent, we certainly won't complain; but we would like to see it back at the 90 percent level.

The second key element is that charter schools and district schools are not competing. When students leave my school, Freedom Prep,

30 percent of them choose to return to a Camden City District school; 15 percent to a Camden Renaissance school; and 8 percent to a neighboring school district. While those children have left my school, they are still all of our children and, as a matter of equity, we believe that all Camden children -- and all children throughout the State of New Jersey -- should carry with them funds consistent with their individual needs.

The third key factor is that charter schools are in demand by parents. We have a wait list of more than 20,000 households throughout the State of New Jersey that are interested in attending charter schools. So it's a very large number of families; and they merit fairness, just like every other family in the State of New Jersey.

Two other pieces of information I'd like to share with you.

Because of the way we're currently funded, our staff is doing more with less. In a recent survey of our teaching staff, they reported that they spend an average of 66.5 hours per week, in and out of the school, on classroom duties. That's an average of more than 13 hours a day across a five-day work week. Our teachers demonstrate indefatigable levels of dedication, professionalism, and commitment to our scholars; and we want to appreciate their dedication, but also reward their service.

I've used up my time. I thank you for giving me that time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for joining us.

Any questions? (no response) No?

Thank you so much.

MR. BRADY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: I'd also like to call Ian Fallstich (indicating pronunciation); I'm sorry. Is Ian here; the M.E.T.S. Charter School? (no response) No?

Okay.

Next, we'll call Annette Castiglione.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: I'm not Annette. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Good evening; welcome.

ANNETTE CASTIGLIONE: Good evening, and thank you for this opportunity to address this Committee.

My name is Annette Castiglione; I am the Superintendent in Camden County, Bellmawr, New Jersey.

I'd like to just repeat, or support, what Freeholder Rodriguez said about the importance of treating every district as equally and fairly as possible. Because every student in every district is important; and has differing needs, but needs to be educated in the 21st century.

Bellmawr is a district whose poverty rate has increased, from the time I started there in 2007, from 40 percent to 52 percent. We are now considered an *at-risk* district because of that poverty level, and because 25 percent of our students are not performing as they should be.

We have large class sizes and insufficient personnel to address the needs of our students. We are historically underfunded; if the funding formula were to be funded, we would see, certainly, \$5 million more a year. I know that that is unrealistic; I think we're doing a yeoman's job with the funds that we have. But I have privatized nurses; I have privatized all guidance counselors; I do not have enough basic skills teachers to instruct

our students, and those I have are funded through Federal grants. I have, and my staff has, applied for every possible grant; and we have been quite successful. We are a full-day, 3- and 4-year-old program -- preschool program; that is done primarily with grant funds.

The rest of the program, however, is suffering greatly. We're Abbott-like, without Abbott funds. I know that there is a Senate bill on the floor. My District -- unlike some of my colleagues -- would stand to benefit greatly from the Senate bill; we would see an increase of \$5 million a year. I know that is not possible; fully funding the SFRA is not possible. I'm realistic; I understand where you are. But I do beg you to consider that a solution to the funding situation in our schools is absolutely necessary.

If I were to cast my vote, I would ask that you support the Senate bill.

Thank you very much for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Superintendent, just a minute.

Does anybody have any questions?

MS. CASTIGLIONE: Oh, sorry, sorry.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Well, of course. (laughter)

MS. CASTIGLIONE: I should have known that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes, you should have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: There you go. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: This Superintendent is a very fine and *old* friend -- should I use that term?

MS. CASTIGLIONE: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: And has done an extraordinary job as the Superintendent in Bellmawr, which is, again, part of the 5th District.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Though this meeting isn't in the 5th District, it's about as close as you can get to the 5th District; and I am very pleased that so many people have come out.

But you mentioned privatizing. I know I've been getting e-mails from different employees in school districts about getting privatized out of their jobs.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: So you've just spoken to that fact. And I think actually -- I may be incorrect -- that that's the first time I've actually heard that in one of these hearings.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: So I did that in 2009 for the 2009-2010 budget, because our District lost \$1.3 million. We're a small District; we're 1,220 kids. As I said, if you use the Comparative Spending Guide, we are well below where we should be; we are well below funding.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Right.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: My priority and my team's priority was to keep teachers in classrooms. It was a very difficult decision to privatize those two areas.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Right.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: And I am loathe to do it in any other areas. But if our priority is teaching and learning--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: It's teaching and learning.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: --it's teaching and learning.

And I won't go into all the details about facilities that I heard spoken about here this evening. The Assemblywoman knows the woes of Bellmawr.

Please consider how you can treat each district as fairly as possible.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Superintendent, I also agree with the Assemblywoman. We haven't heard of anyone come before us throughout these hearings that they have a private-public type of a relationship in our lower grades. And it just so happens that the Assemblywoman and I drove down together and we were discussing it as something to look into as well

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Discussing it; yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --as something to look into as well.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: Look, I had to do it. I did it, and it worked.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: No, it worked.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: That's right.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: But the first year -- and the budget hearing that I had, where I laid those people off, was very difficult and very unpopular.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: I can imagine; I'm sure.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: You never like to see people lose their jobs, their livelihoods.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Absolutely.

Thank you for joining us.

MS. CASTIGLIONE: You're more than welcome. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Next, we'll have Steve Robbins.

Mr. Robbins.

MAYOR MEDANY: (off mike) Madam Chair, I have a Little League meeting to get to, so thank for letting me speak.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, thank you for joining us.

MAYOR MEDANY: They're going to ask me for money.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Good evening; welcome.

S T E V E N R O B B I N S: Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify this evening.

My name is Steve Robbins; and, like Chris Benedetto -- who you heard from earlier today -- I'm representing the Cherry Hill Parents for Fair Funding Committee.

My purpose for testifying specifically today is to further inform you of the existence of our group, who we are, our goals, and what you can expect from us and hear from us in the future.

You've heard from a School Board member from Cherry Hill; you've heard from another parent; so far, I believe, we are the only non-either, school or government official to testify before the Committee. And the reason why we're here is to let you know that us ordinary citizens are listening and paying attention.

The Committee formed as a result of school officials telling the public that they've gone to the Legislature, time and time again, and were told the same thing, over and over -- that basically they were sick of hearing from the school officials; they got it. Who they weren't hearing from were the voters.

Well, here we are. And you have more of our details in my written testimony. So rather than repeat it, I'll simply say, in days ahead, you're going to hear from us. We're going to connect with other groups. We're going to continue to do grassroots lobbying. We have met with our own legislators, but we're going to expand, and we're going to coordinate. And together we'll engage in a coordinated, direct lobbying and direct support to candidates -- regardless of party affiliation or incumbency -- who will make our Committee's goals their goals; who have a genuine willingness to make it happen.

The time to act is now. The voters are paying attention now, and you should expect to hear from us now.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mr. Robbins, thank you.

Does anyone have any questions? (no response)

Mr. Robbins, I think that the voters have always paid attention. I think that sometimes we get compliant (*sic*). And I welcome you to reach out to my door; and I'm sure that every member on this Committee welcomes you to reach out to them because we work for you, so we need to hear from you.

MR. ROBBINS: You will. (laughter)

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Next, we'll call Lori Moore.

Welcome.

L O R I L. M O O R E, Ed. D. Thank you.

I'm Lori Moore, the Superintendent of Lindenwold School District in Camden County.

In 2009 -- the only year that the formula was funded -- Lindenwold did provide tax relief to its citizens. But now, eight years later, we find ourselves unable to provide a thorough and efficient education for our population.

So what's changed in Lindenwold is what I want to share with you today.

We have approximately 2,725 students, pre-K to 12; and that represents a 400-student gain from the time the formula was funded. Our poverty level has increased during that time, from 60 percent free and reduced lunch to 80 percent free and reduced lunch, districtwide.

Our English language learner population has skyrocketed. We went from 155 English language learners to 454 Limited English Proficient students in that time period, many of which are newcomers to the country, or high school students who haven't been in formal education since 3rd grade. Yet, our funding has remained flat.

The formula was designed to adjust funding, based on enrollment increases and decreases; and provided weighted calculations for at-risk factors, including poverty and English language learners, recognizing that at-risk students require additional services to be successful.

You know, as you're aware, the State has funded approximately

85 percent of the SFRA formula; and Lindenwold is funded at about 61 percent, which represents about \$9.5 million that we're not receiving in State funding.

We understand that the State is unable to fully fund the formula, but we are asking the State to apply the formula to the distribution of available funds equitably.

As you know, the annual budget process caps the increase on taxes at 2 percent. The only mechanism to increase taxes is to use banked cap. Our Board has utilized \$1.3 million of banked cap in the past two budget years to provide much needed services to our students, placing the community over their fair share. So we're under adequacy and over fair share.

Ultimately, the full burden of the increased enrollment and changes in our demographics is being placed on the backs of our residents to support. Keep in mind that 80 percent of our children, who are currently receiving free and reduced meals, naturally come from households in our community who are living below the poverty line. Our residents are absorbing tax increases at a higher ratio than their neighboring towns, and we are providing inadequate services, as prescribed by the NJDOE. And this financial fallout, to us, is a social injustice.

Our students deserve the same educational opportunities as other students in New Jersey. And we're here today to advocate for what is fair for our kids and our community.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Anybody have any questions?

DR. MOORE: We did provide a data packet with more detailed data information on Lindenwold School District.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Superintendent.

One of my colleagues--

DR. MOORE: And this is -- I'm sorry -- my BA, Kathleen Huder.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay.

DR. MOORE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Do you wish to say anything; do you wish to address us?

KATHLEEN HUDER: No, I was just here to accompany--

I mean, as Dr. Moore pointed out, we did provide additional statistics that are -- support all this information here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

One of my colleagues-- Assemblyman Singleton has been asking Superintendents -- because of the numbers and all the data that you have -- if you would think that it would be wise to run the school funding formula with whatever monies we get now. Should we let it run?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Yes.

DR. MOORE: Yes.

MS. HUDER: Yes, I mean--

DR. MOORE: Yes, that's what we're asking.

MS. HUDER: That's exactly what we're saying.

DR. MOORE: Equitable distribution. If you're funding 85 percent, we would like 85 percent of what we're entitled to, as opposed to districts that are receiving upwards of 140 percent of what they're entitled

to. Our demographics have significantly changed. We have major capacity issues, from a building perspective; and we can't appropriately plan, because we don't have the money to take care of the needs of our students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

I will tell you that you are, probably, number two -- the second person who has answered that question in the affirmative.

Thank you; thank you very much.

MS. HUDER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: We're going to call now Patricia Calandro--

PATRICIA A. CALANDRO: (off mike) That's right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay; Dr. James Lavender; and Jason Schimpf. There is an extra seat over here, if we could just, maybe, bring it over so that we could have everyone up.

Welcome.

JAMES J. LAVENDER, Ed.D. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Oh, you have a parent with you that you want to-- Does the parent want to address the audience?

DR. LAVENDER: She did register--

JENNIFER CAVALLARO - FROMM: (off mike) I did register.

DR. LAVENDER: Jennifer Cavallaro.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Oh, okay; okay.

DR. LAVENDER: Do you want her to come up, Madam Chair?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Yes, please.

MS. CAVALLARO: Do you want me to wait, or--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: No, no, please. If we can squeeze another chair.

DR. LAVENDER: We brought the whole Kingsway Regional contingent with us. We travel--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: No; welcome, welcome.

Good evening.

DR. LAVENDER: They're actually here to protect me.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Actually, to be honest with you, Jennifer was next. (laughter)

MS. CAVALLARO: Well, good.

DR. LAVENDER: Does it matter what order we go, Madam Chair?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: It does not, it does not.
Please.

DR. LAVENDER: I'm going to attempt to paraphrase my notes; you're hearing quite a bit from everybody else.

Good evening, Assembly Education Committees. My name is Jim Lavender; and I am the Superintendent at Kingsway Regional, a position I've held at Kingsway since 2010.

We are one of the state's fastest-growing school districts. We're up 133 percent in a decade, and we continue to grow, despite the housing bubble burst -- 133 percent. We continue to grow, currently, at 6 percent a year; and we have done so, consistently, over the past few years, and anticipate another 5 to 6 percent growth going into next year.

State aid, however, has failed to keep up. We're down, per pupil, by 29 percent over the last decade.

The burden to fund our schools has been disproportionately shifted onto the backs of our local taxpayers. And I'm one of them; I live and work in the same District, and I'm a parent; and I send my student -- my children to my schools.

Local property taxes have increased by 142 percent in the Kingsway Regional. In fact, had the SFRA been funded in my District over the past nine years, Kingsway would have levied \$33 million less in local property taxes.

Yes, this is as much a property tax issue as it is a school funding issue; and our residents have told us so, defeating two recent referendums to replace our high school track -- which has been dilapidated and not able to be used for competition -- and to expand our transportation center, which we need to desperately expand due to our growth.

With respect to our schools, we received just 46 percent of full SFRA funding. Our 2,700 students make up the one million students in the State of New Jersey who do not receive what they are entitled to, according to the SFRA formula.

With each passing year, the State of New Jersey and the State Legislature have pushed us closer to the cliff. And this year, assuming flat State aid -- which is what we're being told now by the Acting Commissioner -- we face a \$2 million budget deficit. In a District that spends the lowest per pupil of any regional 7-12 district in the state, this is devastating to us, and we can't do any more with any less.

To balance the 2017-2018 budget, I'll need to cut -- and I heard Ms. Jones talk about this -- we will need to cut middle school sports, freshman sports, our 4:00 bus, our school Resource Officer, and 29 faculty and staff positions in this District. It's not fair to my kids, it's not fair to our staff, it's not fair to our community knowing that some districts in this state receive well over 100 percent; some receive 284 percent or 335 percent. How can any lawmaker tell any of us that it's okay that the funding allocations are dictated by your zip code?

I'm asking you to intervene now, in time, before we strike our 2017-2018 operating budgets, and reallocate State aid to conform to the SFRA. And if we don't have the money, then underfund us all fairly.

I'm number three. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: I was going to say -- I was going to ask you the same question; because, unfortunately, Assemblyman Singleton couldn't be here, and I know that he's been asking that question.

So you're in favor of running the formula.

DR. LAVENDER: Please, please -- underfunded. It's not fair, Madam Chair; it's simply just not-- We don't want to pit districts, and we don't want to harm other districts. If you come down to Kingsway, and you see how unfairly we have been funded over these years, to see other districts throughout the state overly funded -- per the formula, per the formula; that's the construct that we're looking at -- it is not fair to these kids, and they didn't ask for it.

And I can't believe New Jersey -- one of the most progressive states in the entire country -- is still grappling with this issue. And you have the playbook in front of you, with SFRA. You have the playbook; it tells

you exactly-- It's a playbook that's been lauded by experts as genius; it's been copied by other states. New Jersey just can't seem to follow that playbook. It's not fair to these kids.

Please help us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Doctor.

Does anyone have any questions?

Please.

ASSEMBLYMAN TALIAFERRO: Well, just more of a comment.

I live in that District, pay taxes in that District, and have had plenty of conversations with Dr. Lavender and the team.

And I just want to thank you guys because we're all-- This is a citizens' Legislature; so we all have full-time jobs. But this team has been, kind of, my rock in helping to educate me on the issues. So as the gentleman from Cherry Hill -- our friends from Cherry Hill said, continue to educate us, because the more I talk to Dr. Lavender, the more shocked I am at how horrible the situation is in my home district; and I'm sure we all have our own stories.

So I just wanted to commend you guys, and everybody here again; because that education has been priceless, and these hearings have been very helpful.

DR. LAVENDER: Thank you, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN TALIAFERRO: Thank you for what you're doing.

DR. LAVENDER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes, more comment than anything.

On my way to our last hearing -- which was in Hackensack -- I was asked to attend a State School Board meeting about special education in private special education schools--

DR. LAVENDER: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --which I did. And it just happened after my colleague in the Senate and I had sent a letter out, the beginning of this year, about this issue of the imbalance in funding. We picked on Newark and Jersey City -- Jersey City, the second-largest city in our state; and Newark, the largest -- and the imbalance between those two former Abbott districts.

At the School Board meeting, I sat there and-- Apparently, any district under State control has to report annually, for each year, to the Board. And Jersey City happened to be there. There were at least 40-plus Administrators with the Superintendent -- she was the only one who spoke -- and she spoke of such extraordinary programs. God bless them for what they're using their money for.

DR. LAVENDER: Great.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: But the inequity was played out later that day at our hearing when Bayonne, the town next to them--

DR. LAVENDER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --came in and said they are actually selling metal and collecting newspaper to raise money to help their very-underfunded district.

The playout of this disparity is extraordinary. I'm glad you're number three--

DR. LAVENDER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --at 85 percent, if we can ever even get there. (laughter)

DR. LAVENDER: Your story tells the tale in New Jersey, without a doubt.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: It totally did. It was so graphic for me, it plays out when I try to sleep at night -- trying to figure out how we're going to grapple with this.

But to somebody who called us *politicians*, we really are not. We are really *you*, sitting here, like you're sitting when you're running your school district. We're people who care about our communities, all of us. We have a wonderful new Chairwoman for the Assembly Education Committee; and boy, has she battened down the hatches (laughter), I can assure you. It's a pleasure to serve with her.

And how we find our way out of this mess is beyond me. But I think this Legislature has more guts than many that came before it. Because just look at the gas tax we actually did -- we shouldn't mention that (laughter) -- after other legislators didn't do it; remember that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thanks, Assemblywoman.
Please.

MS. CALANDRO: So thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Patricia Calandro; I'm the Chief Academic Officer with the Kingsway Regional School District.

Along with many others in this room, I've experienced, first hand, how the State's refusal to appropriately and fairly fund our District continues to fail our students and our community. Despite years of creative budgeting, hard work, and simply doing more with less, we are, at this point, broken.

Currently, we do not have the special education resources to adhere to the legal limits under IDEA. As a result, this past year, we faced a shortage of special education teachers; and had to submit three different applications for waivers to the County regarding class size restriction for special education students placed in their least-restrictive environment.

Our ESL population continues to grow and, in five years, it has more than tripled. Yet the State's continuing issuance of flat-funding to districts like Kingsway displays a neglect for two of the subgroups in need of significant academic supports.

Forget one-to-one initiatives and technology classes. Our inability to upgrade our wireless network infrastructure makes the infusion of educational technology into the classroom unreliable and ineffective. Our high school students consistently express a desire to take AP courses or career-centered electives, but we cannot meet the demands due to budget constraints. Students are left to choose a study hall or a course that does not meet their career goal.

In our last strategic planning process, our community overwhelmingly asked us to expand our academies and to develop additional programs to support their child's college and career goals -- types of provisions the State sites in code as secondary education initiatives for

advancing student achievement. And while Kingsway has the talent to create the programs, we do not have the money.

Today, I am in need of at least 25 teachers across the District to operate programs appropriately. And in our middle school, 98 classes have a class size of 30 or greater, with many of the remaining classes just one or two students away from this threshold.

Yet, classrooms remain empty. Kingsway has the physical space to accommodate this population, but we do not have the funding to hire the teachers.

Without our fair share of State funding, nearly every class at the middle school next year will have a class size of 30 or greater, additional programs will be cut, and more than two dozen faculty will lose their jobs.

It is because of the dedicated administrators, faculty, and staff that Kingsway continues to push forward and produce successful and prepared students. Our students are entering into the same competitive environment as those throughout the State of New Jersey; yet the State's practice of not funding the formula has generated an unlevelled playing field for our students.

I ask today for your support so that we can ensure our students and community receive what is owed to them. We are not asking for more than our share; we are asking only for what our students and communities have been promised under New Jersey's school funding formula.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: If I can ask, how big are your-- Currently, how big are the classroom sizes right now?

MS. CALANDRO: As far as the class size?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Yes.

MS. CALANDRO: About 30; 30 students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay; thank you.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you.

J A S O N S C H I M P F: Good evening. Thank you for allowing me to testify as well.

My name is Jason Schimpf; I'm the Business Administrator for Kingsway Regional. And based on everybody else's testimony and some comments that were just made, I'm going to go a little bit off-script here and not bore you with the details of SFRA and how it came about in 2008. But more than that, I am surprised to hear that you're hearing that SFRA may be the problem.

I can tell you, SFRA, in and of itself, is not the problem. In fact, like Dr. Lavender said, it is being lauded as one of the more progressive and fair formulas. But I do find several problems with it, and I'll just outline those.

The full funding of the SFRA, or lack thereof, was problem number one for school districts. In 2016-2017 alone, the SFRA was underfunded, by the State of New Jersey, \$900 million; and since its inception, it's been underfunded by more than \$8 billion.

Problem number two -- and I think one of the most important ones -- was the inclusion of the hold-harmless provision within the SFRA. In order to ensure that no district saw a decrease in State aid from 2007-2008 levels, the Legislature amended the SFRA at the last minute to include this hold-harmless provision, a provision that was meant to be temporary --

in fact, I believe only the first three years -- in order to slowly bring overfunded districts -- part of the SFRA -- back down to 100 percent of SFRA. As you all know, this too has created large inequities in school funding.

This is a quote here, in an Education Funding Report prepared by then-Commissioner of Education Chris Cerf, in 2012, when referring to adjustment aid; he said, “It is a symbol of the old Trenton; a paean to the long-standing tradition of refusing to make hard choices, even when hard choices are in order; and failing to make hard choices will cost taxpayers greatly.”

The hold-harmless provision has prevented districts with growing enrollments, like Kingsway, from receiving this additional aid, while holding other districts with declining enrollments level. According to the Ed Law Center, nearly \$570 million was allocated to districts in the form of adjustment aid in 2015-2016 alone; of this, nearly \$300 million of the adjustment aid went to districts already spending above their adequacy levels.

Problem number three with the SFRA is how the school aid is allocated amongst the school districts. In 2016-2017 -- and I believe Assemblywoman Jones quoted this earlier -- more than 239 school districts in the State of New Jersey will receive less than 70 percent of the monies they're entitled to, per the SFRA.

So the question I have asked is, “Why?” Why do districts that have been overfunded for years continue to be held harmless, when Kingsway and many other districts continue to be shortchanged?

We've had to survive with less than the fair share of State aid for more than a decade. Enrollment is increasing at nearly 5 percent each year, and the taxpayers already contribute more than their local fair share; and, in addition, will spend almost \$9 million less than our adequacy budget, which is the T & E formula.

The solution is simple and requires, actually, no additional legislation or any other acts. It is to simply fund the formula and begin to remove districts from the adjustment aid, which is close to \$600 million. And like Senator Sweeney has suggested, just adding \$100 million to school funding -- which the State has done for the last several years -- over a period of five years, will get us to 100 percent of SFRA funding within that five-year period.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Does anyone have any questions or comments?

Bob.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you for your testimony this evening.

And my question would be to Dr. Lavender and to Mr. Schimpf, the Business Administrator -- the two of you -- because you both mentioned the same thing, and I am hoping you can give us a little insight.

You've mentioned that there are districts that are getting a disproportional amount of funding. May I ask you to identify three of them for us?

DR. LAVENDER: Well, I can tell you -- I can identify much more than three.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Well, please let your conscience be your guide. (laughter) Go right ahead.

DR. LAVENDER: Brick Township -- that's in -- what? -- Ocean County; I can tell you Hoboken City is in Hudson County;

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Weehawken, Jersey City--

DR. LAVENDER: Jersey City; Weehawken--

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: No, no. no. I can't write that fast. (laughter)

DR. LAVENDER: Sorry. There are about 30 percent of school districts throughout this entire state, which is about 330,000 students, are in districts that receive overfunding. And they touch just about--

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: A lot of former Abbott districts, are they? Are many of them former Abbott districts?

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: No, no--

MR. SCHIMPF: Not necessarily.

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Washington Township, Gloucester County. I have a whole list I can e-mail them to you.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: I'd like to speak with you after, so I can get that.

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Okay, sure.

MR. SCHIMPF: There are many SDA, or former Abbotts, that are also well underfunded still.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Okay.

So what had happened at this last meeting we attended together in Bergen County, we had a school district -- Bayonne -- which abuts Hoboken. And Hoboken is a pretty affluent area, but they are still

receiving extraordinary aid. And Bayonne has been -- as my colleague mentioned, selling metal and all sorts of other things to keep themselves above water, so to speak.

DR. LAVENDER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: So your comment then was, if we made those adjustments now, that you thought within a five-year period we'd be able to get everything back on course, or steady the ship of state, so to speak?

MR. SCHIMPF: That's correct. I mean, when SFRA was first implemented, the idea was to wean these districts off of the adjustment aid. The adjustment aid is making up nearly \$600 million a year, which is calculated outside of the SFRA. It was simply put in there to hold districts that would have seen decreases in State aid harmless.

DR. LAVENDER: So the growth districts that were growing -- like a Kingsway, by way of example -- would have received 20 percent increases a year for five years, until we were made whole; while the districts that may have been overfunded, that had declining enrollment, would have been -- would have lost that adjustment aid over a period of five years, at 20 percent a year for five years.

It was funded in 2008 under Corzine; his last year in office, it was 5 percent. Governor Christie came in the following year and, of course, we know what happened. And then it's been almost status quo since. But the world has changed; and I think one district, Hammonton, or Cherry Hil, had testified that we're all frozen in time. Yet our constituencies, and our residents, and economically, and student growth -- all that has changed;

yet we're still receiving the same funding levels we did nine years ago. And we can't live this way.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you very much for your testimony. And I look forward to getting those lists from you before we finish.

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Sure. I just started to jot down a few: Pemberton, Brick, Asbury, Eatontown, Freehold, Henry Hudson, Highlands, Marlboro, and Oceanport. These are all districts-- And I chose districts that are upwards of over 125 percent. So not even districts that hover at the 100 percent line, but districts that are getting \$1.27 to \$1.58 on the \$1; when our kids -- and you'll hear in my testimony -- are getting 46 cents on the dollar.

So, but, I can -- I'll go into that when I--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please; the floor is yours.

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Oh, great.

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee tonight.

My tone may be a little bit different than those who spoke before me, just because these are my kids; I'm passionate about it; and our situation is dire.

My name is Jennifer Cavallaro-Fromm; I'm the Co-Chair of the Fair Funding Action Committee, and I have previously served as the Swedesboro-Woolwich Board of Education President. I'm also a New Jersey taxpaying resident and, most importantly, I'm a mother.

I want you to understand that I am not new to this conversation. From early 2010 to 2013, for 781 days, I volunteered

alongside a core group of people, including Dr. Lavender, and organized a grassroots effort to lobby the Department of Education, the Legislature, and the Governor.

For a decade we have experienced explosive growth in our student population with no acknowledgement from the State. We followed Governor Christie across the state for over two years. We ultimately garnered his support for a Supplemental Extraordinary Growth Aid bill that was drafted and supported by our District 3 legislators. This necessary aid provided a temporary Band-Aid. We are now at the point where we are hemorrhaging out.

As parents, we know there are expectations and responsibilities that are ours to carry. We do our part. We pay over and above our fair share in property taxes; we supplement and provide experiences and opportunities the schools cannot financially afford to do. We teach our children to work hard, to be responsible. We are active partners in learning. We are doing our part.

The State of New Jersey is not doing its part. Leaving us funded at 54 percent for our local elementary school, and 46 percent for our middle and high school -- it is actually more than not doing your part; it is flat-out failing us.

My goal testifying tonight is to, hopefully, help you understand that the grossly disproportionate State aid we receive has an impact beyond just data.

My daughter Olivia is a driven and competitive 8th grader, who is involved in honors courses, athletics, and chorus. While I am continually impressed by the innovative teachers at Kingsway, I'm concerned with the

challenges that our students face. They're expected to keep up with accelerated course pacing, rigorous curriculum -- all while doing it with over 30 kids in a classroom. I'm concerned that their extracurricular activities and athletic opportunities will continue to dwindle and possibly be eliminated, as you heard. I'm concerned that my daughter's experiences with technology are already obsolete, because our school doesn't have the proper resources to fund those programs. Her desire to participate in additional honors courses may not be realized next year, as staff is reduced and study halls are increased.

Experiences like Olivia's are mirrored in our local elementary school. My 3rd grader, Jackson, is an amazing little boy who has a natural curiosity for learning and a passion for technology and math. Like our middle school and high school, his access to technology is restrictive. Opportunities and resources for accelerated math are practically nonexistent. Our elementary school does not have literacy coaches, reading specialists, one-to-one technology initiatives. And most of our content areas -- students have to share textbooks. We don't have enough textbooks.

So I ask this Committee, how is that fair? We pay over our fair share, yet our students get diminishing resources. We have a funding formula that is constitutional, thoughtfully created, and represents all students. The SFRA allows for proper accommodations for all students. This formula was created to equalize the playing field, keeping every district at 100 percent fair threshold. Thirty percent of the districts in the state receive more than their fair share. To fund those districts at their current rates, and simultaneously attempt to bring each of the 70 percent that are

underfunded to 100 percent, is not sustainable. We know this. This mess was created by trying to hold those overfunded districts harmless.

I'm not advocating to hurt other districts, but what is fair is fair. How do I tell my daughter that she is valued at 46 cents on the dollar in our community; but if we moved one zip code over she's worth \$1.47 on the dollar?

Our community's story, Olivia and Jackson's story, my story, is not unique to Kingsway. This is happening throughout the state and in your legislative backyards. Richfield Park School District, Mount Laurel, West Orange, North Bergen -- just to name a few. You have an opportunity to help 990,000 students in those underfunded districts, including your own. Support funding and running the SFRA this budget cycle. I've heard tonight that the SFRA cannot be fully funded; as you've heard from this panel, it can if we run it without the additional hold-harmless provisions, no adjustment aid, no enrollment caps. Run it as originally intended; it can be done this budget cycle.

Speaking for my children, children in our community, and yours, we hope that you do your job.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

Does anyone have any comments? (no response)

Thank you so much--

DR. LAVENDER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --for everything that you provided for us.

DR. LAVENDER: Thank you, everybody.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

MS. CAVALLARO-FROMM: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Next, we'll call Manuel Delgado. (no response) Is Mr. Delgado here? (no response)

Patrick McAleer (indicating pronunciation) -- I'm sorry; I know I butchered that one -- the Superintendent from Pittman.

Sir, what's your last name?

P A T R I C K J. M c A L E E R, Ed.D.: McAleer (indicating pronunciation)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: McAleer; my apologies.

DR. McALEER: No problem at all.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Welcome.

DR. McALEER: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and members of the Committee for coming to South Jersey this evening.

My purpose in coming before you this evening is to share my perspective on the current funding debate, and ask for your careful consideration in any actions you may ultimately take.

As you had said earlier, I am Superintendent of Schools in Pitman; it's a community not far from here. We serve approximately 1,500 students in grades pre-K through 12, and we have a long-standing reputation of providing excellent educational experiences to our students.

In the conversation that is currently taking place with school funding -- depending on the numbers that you look at, regarding my district -- we might be considered as one of the lucky ones. Our funding is slightly above 100 percent of the SFRA 2008 formula. As such, I'm here to

represent that side of the issue, which has concerns about the implementation of any changes to current funding through significant adjustments in State support.

So depending on which numbers you look at for my District, we stand to lose up to -- around 20 percent of our current State aid allotment, if there is a plan to phase out hold-harmless funding.

And I can appreciate and understand the issues of fairness and equity. But I have concerns that lawmakers will come up with a -- I think you referred to a *one-size-fits-all* solution. And I would ask that everyone on the Committee and everyone in the State Legislature consider a more nuanced evaluation of individual and unique situations affecting these districts.

As a point of example, the community of Pitman continues to suffer from the recent closing of the Sony plant. It's the largest employer in the town; it was the largest taxpayer in the town. It was a property once valued at \$18 million; it's now down to \$3 million. And so the burden of paying those costs of maintaining the police department, maintaining municipal government, maintaining the school district, have been shifted dramatically to the taxpayers and homeowners in the community.

Just to give you some other information about my District over the time since hold-harmless aid went into effect: I have five schools in my community. One of the schools -- when hold-armless went into effect -- reached the Federal threshold for Federal breakfast program; now, all five. I have one of my schools in that time that has seen its percentage of free and reduce lunch students triple. I have three buildings of my five that are over 90 years old. And if I were to characterize what we've done with our

funding and our taxpayer support since 2010, I would say we've put Humpty Dumpty back together again; but not much else.

To be clear, I'm not opposed to a resolution that full funds underfunded school districts; I believe that they should be funded at 100 percent of the formula. But so should we.

And so I would ask that the Committee, and the Legislature in general, consider a nuanced approach to solving this issue that takes into account the unique circumstances of districts such as mine.

I want to thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Superintendent.

Any questions, or any comments?

Please.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Something you don't know about this person on this Committee, but I attended Pittman High School and Pittman grade school--

DR. McALEER: Go, Panthers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --but you didn't let me graduate. (laughter) We moved; we moved to Pennsylvania at the time.

But anyway-- So I have a fondness in my heart for all things Pittman, because my husband certainly did graduate. You let him out; imagine. (laughter)

Anyway, but I thank you.

So I know Pittman, and I know its story pretty well. And I like your inference about nuance, but I'd like more information about that. We're never going to have the funds to do what we need to do, which is to

fund everybody at 100 percent. Not in this round. And we're, right now, waiting for the Governor's budget message--

DR. McALEER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: --which will be some tale to be told.

DR. McALEER: It sure will.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes, so--

Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Superintendent, if I may.

Historically, we know that the school funding formula had that adjustment aid, or the hold-harmless aid. And it was supposed to be phased out within the five-year period, I believe it is.

DR. McALEER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Dr. Lavender, I think, said three; I think it was five. Semantics.

DR. McALEER: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Has your District looked into any kind of a backup plan, if it was to be phased out -- how to address that issue? Or is that something that has never been looked upon because of the irregularities with the actual funding of this formula?

DR. McALEER: I'd have to project in terms of a phase-out of all of our \$1.6 million in adjustment aid over five years. But I heard other districts describe situations where there would be multiple layoffs over the course of multiple years.

In essence, I describe us as putting Humpty Dumpty back together again. We would be dismantling Humpty Dumpty at that point.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay; thank you.

Thank you for your answer.

DR. McALEER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Next, we'll call Lynn DiPietropolo, Superintendent.

Good evening, ladies.

LYNN DiPIETROPOLO: Good evening.

My name is Lynn DiPietropolo; I am the Superintendent, the Principal, and also the Director of Curriculum Instruction. So yes, I hold all three full-time positions in my District.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Wow.

MS. DiPIETROPOLO: With me I also have Adrienne McManis; she is my Assistant Principal, and also the Director of Special Ed. So she holds two titles.

I also have a BA who could not be with us this evening; so there are only three of us in the entire District who are Administrators.

Clementon Elementary School is in Camden County. It is a District Factor B school, with a 62 percent poverty rate. We are a preschool to 8th grade District, with about 440 students. We are also a schoolwide District that is Title I, and we have about a \$12.5 million budget.

We are here, for the testimony, to showcase our District that has been fiscally responsible with the taxpayers, with only a 1 percent tax levy for the last two years; while still having a successful educational program to increase student achievement.

Based on our PARCC scores, students in grades 3 through 8 -- every grade level -- in math and ELA outperformed both the State and PARCC states in our scores.

In addition, in Camden County, although there is no formal ranking in New Jersey, we do like to compare ourselves with other school districts. In our own County -- and remember, we are a District Factor B school; there are other schools, such as G, H, I and J -- we would rank ourselves 2nd in ELA and 6th in math.

In New Jersey, with other District Factor B groups, we are ranked 2nd in ELA and 4th in math.

Our Student Growth Percentiles for teachers equals 3.7, which is in the *highly effective* range.

And our Student Growth Percentiles are as high as 86 percent on PARCC. And these are only a small percentages of success we have in our school district.

Right now, we are working with a minimal budget, and we are already at bare bones. So right now, if there should be any more reductions in our aid, these are the items that are on the table to be eliminated.

We would have to reduce our already full-day kindergarten to half-day, which would cause us to be out of compliance with Administrative Code. We would have to eliminate all afterschool activities, such as sports and performing arts. We would have to eliminate all of our special area classes -- music, STEM, art, Spanish, phys ed; and our regular ed teachers would have to teach those classes, and they have not been trained in those areas.

We would have to increase class size; and since we are a high-poverty District, we would be out of compliance with Administrative Code.

We would have to eliminate all remedial classes; and all those students who need additional support would not be able to receive it. And, of course, like every other school district, a reduction in force would be drastic.

We also have items in our budget that are very unpredictable and unknown each year and, in our District, are on the rise: transportation, homeless, special ed out-of-district placements, children who are incarcerated, and students placed by DCP&P.

So we thank you for your time and your support. And any reductions for our District will drastically impact our educational program that we have for our students.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Any comments or questions?

(no response)

Superintendent, let me just ask you. Did you state that the town only uses 1 percent of the 2 percent tax?

MS. DiPIETROPOLO: Yes, which is equal to about \$40,000.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay.

Thank you.

MS. DiPIETROPOLO: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you very much.

We're going to call up the group from Camden -- Principal Greg Cappello-- Oh, we had him.

What about Jennifer Perez, Desmond Benson, and Shawn Miles?

I'm sorry; do we have the parents?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: I just wanted to make note that we have another Mayor here; Somerdale Mayor Gary Passanante. Also an official with the New Jersey Conference of Mayors -- which just recently had a wonderful workshop, with both Senator Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Prieto -- talking about this issue. So I thank him for bringing that issue to the Mayors.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, do you wish to address the board afterwards -- the Committee?

MAYOR GARY PASSANANTE: (off mike) If there's time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay; thank you.

Gentlemen, welcome.

SHAWN MILES: Hi; how are you doing?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please, just state your name, and the floor is yours.

MR. MILES: My name is Shawn Miles; I'm from Parents for Great Camden Schools.

How are you doing today?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Great; thank you for joining us.

DESMOND BENSON: Thank you.

And also, my name is Desmond Benson; I'm also with Parents for Great Camden Schools. I'm also a citizen of Camden, New Jersey; I live in Camden.

And I have two -- a stepson and a daughter who attend schools in Camden City.

I have-- I would like to see public schools -- charter and Renaissance Schools funded equally so our students can be served equally in both, again, charter and Renaissance schools. I would like to see everyone work together; and I would like to have all voices heard and considered.

We all can-- The most important part of our conversation is our students. We shouldn't be fighting over all our students and can't (indiscernible) each other, and destroy.

I don't think charter school expansion is a driver of district budget problems. I think the destruction is the board are -- of the funding issues in the schools. So I think all charter schools and Renaissance schools should be funded equally so our students can be served equally throughout the school district.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Mr. Benson.
Does anyone have any comments?

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Did you say that--
May I?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Go ahead; yes, of course.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: No, no.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Did you say it was Academy schools in Camden, did you--

MR. BENSON: No; charter and Renaissance schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: No, what was the name of the school you had mentioned? Did you mention one, specifically, in the beginning of your testimony?

MR. BENSON: No sir. We're from Parents for Great Camden Schools. We actually are parent advocate leaders.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Oh, okay.

MR. BENSON: We advocate for education and students.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: I'm sorry; I misunderstood.

Thank you for the clarification.

Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Is Alicia Rivera here? (no response)

No? Okay; because I know she is also part of your group.

MR. BENSON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mr. Miles, would you like to address us?

MR. MILES: I'm just here with him. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: You're here to--

MR. MILES: To support him.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: For support.

Thank you so much for appearing before us.

MR. BENSON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: And thank you for your comments.

ALL: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Have a good evening.

The Superintendent from Pennsauken; is our Superintendent here? (no response)

I'm going to pronounce the last name, and I know I'm going to pronounce it incorrectly -- Ronnie Tarchichi (indicating pronunciation). (no response) No?

Okay.

Rita Romeu.

Good evening, and welcome.

RITA ROMEU: Hi, thank you.

My name is Rita Romeu, and I am a newly elected Committeewoman for Chesterfield Township.

I want to thank all of you for soliciting comments from the public on what I think is one of the most important issues in New Jersey.

During my campaigning, I spoke to many, many voters in my Township. This issue -- besides the proposed compressor station and pipeline -- was the most discussed and questioned. People are very concerned about Chesterfield's situation, and the State as a whole. Our property taxes have skyrocketed, and our schools are struggling to meet basic needs.

I think it's easy to chalk up these funding gaps up to the fact that there is not a lot of money around the State right now. It is easy to say the State cannot afford to provide large amounts of aid to school districts. But I don't think that's the problem here. The situation I just described in Chesterfield is not the story throughout the State. There are some districts that are getting significantly more in aid than they should.

And I just want to go over a few facts; and I know some of them have been mentioned by other speakers here tonight.

But there are about 591 school districts in the state; 212 of them are receiving more than 100 percent of SFRA uncapped funding; and 379 schools are receiving less than 100 percent -- and 345 of those are receiving less than 85 percent, the amount the formula is currently funded at. This leaves more than half of the school districts in the state below the 85 percent mark of the current formula.

Chesterfield is funded at only 11 percent. That's what I just said, 11 percent. So we're receiving 11 percent of the uncapped aid we should be, according to the SFRA.

Some other statewide facts, which I think, you know, you've heard a little bit of.

There are over 900,000 students in under aided school districts, while there are just over 300,000 students in overfunded districts. Collectively underfunded districts are paying \$1.9 billion above their fair share because of the inactivity of anything being done to remedy this.

To get back to Chesterfield for a minute -- you know, we have been pinching pennies for the last several years and making very difficult financial decisions that we would not have to make if we were even close to being properly funded by the State. When we have to absorb unexpected expenses, it's very difficult; and we're running on a very, very tight budget and being scrutinized by all of our citizens.

Okay; I only have 30 seconds, so let me skip to the conclusion.

I feel -- as one of the other speakers said -- the SFRA, at its core, is not the problem. I think if followed, with the exception of a few

provisions, it would provide what I believe to be a fair distribution of State funds to districts across the state. However, there are a few provisions in the law that are problematic. First, is the hold-harmless provision. If a district has decreased enrollment or an increase in their tax base, it only makes sense for the aid they receive to reflect that. I think that was the intention of the formula.

The bill also has the enrollment cap. And if you aren't going to cap our growth, please don't cap our aid. Chesterfield has experienced significant enrollment increases for several years now, while the aid we receive from the State has stayed flat, exacerbating the issues we face from underfunding.

And I totally understand why provisions like this make their way into the legislation. Legislators look out for their own districts because that is their job. But I think this issue is so important that it really requires impartial arbiters.

The residents of Chesterfield and other underfunded districts -- as we've heard here tonight -- cannot wait any longer for action. We really need help, and we need it now. We cannot wait another year.

So thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Does anyone have questions or comments?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: I have a comment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: It is just a comment.

The 32nd Legislative District -- which I've probably said before, which is the District that I represent, and so does the Speaker of the Assembly -- is one of the most poorly funded in the state.

MS. ROMEU: And I do know that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: So believe me, we are-- That's why we're doing this.

But thank you.

MS. ROMEU: And thank you all, very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Madam Chair, may I ask one quick question?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Yes, of course.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: You mentioned impartial arbiters. Have you had any experience with them in the past, where you thought that they would be beneficial here?

MS. ROMEU: I and some of my colleagues feel that it would just help everybody -- all of you -- to take the political aspect out of it, if we did that. And then that way the pressure would be off you all, and the right decisions could be made, I think.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you very much.

MS. ROMEU: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you; thank you.

Next, we'll call Joseph Campisi; Mr. Campisi.

Mr. Campisi, I'm sorry I didn't see you there earlier. I know we had some of your colleagues up before you.

J O S E P H C A M P I S I, Ed.D.: No, that's okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: My apologies.

MR. CAMPISI: No problem.

I'm actually here on behalf of my Superintendent, Dr. Joseph Meloche. He was unable to attend, so I am here to communicate some statements in his place.

"Members of the Committee, colleagues, community members, my name is Dr. Joseph Meloche; I'm the proud Superintendent of the Cherry Hill Public Schools.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee and to humanize the impact of the current approach to school funding and the effect that it's had on the Cherry Hill School District.

"Cherry Hill is an incredible community in which to live, and to work, and raise a family. Cherry Hill is where I grew up, where I attended school, and where my wife and I are raising our four children. The Cherry Hill School District is a wonderfully diverse tapestry of families of so many different backgrounds and so many different means. Among our 11,254 students, 54 languages are spoken at home; more than 2,500 are bilingual; and in our six Title I schools, nearly 1 in 3 children are on free and reduced lunch.

"Our community supports education; in fact, our community demands a top-quality education for each of our children. I am incredibly proud of the outcomes and the success of our students, our test scores, and the external validation we receive. In fact, we were just recently notified that we are a State District of Character.

“The Board of Education in Cherry Hill, as a fluid body, has maintained focus on student achievement and on fiscal responsibility. We have taken advantage of myriad opportunities to partner with the Township on projects, and squeeze everything we are able from our resources.

“But we are at a crossroads. The 81 percent of our budget that is funded by the community as a result of the disproportionate amount of State aid that we receive is negatively impacting our children. Cherry Hill receives about \$1,100 per child, far below what the funding formula indicates we should receive. I currently have Advanced Placement classes at the high school level in excess of 40 students. We have had to eliminate staff, we have had to eliminate professional development opportunities, we have eliminated extra-curricular opportunities, we have frozen spending, and we have even heralded the nostalgic value of chalk in one of our middle schools instead of installing white boards.

“We allow students to carry more books because we have lockers that are unusable and must be replaced; just not yet. We have buildings that are tired at best; in fact, I had a legislator suggest creating a crisis in the community by allowing a building to be condemned to shed light on the inadequacy of the current State funding. We are in a crisis.

“We bandage, and polish, and shine, and accommodate; and explain to our parents that we are focusing on instruction, and relationships, and outcomes -- which are critical, and in which we are so successful. We ask them to look beyond the facilities, the pot holes, the equipment that is not replaced, and innovative programs that are not pursued; that while our neighbors have full-day kindergarten or one-to one initiatives, and we do not.

“On behalf of the Cherry Hill School District, I want equitable funding. I want funding based on who we are today, in 2017, not who we were in 2005 or 1985. I want the Legislature to uphold the commitment that was established in the adoption of the funding formula.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee. Thank you for your time and your willingness to support the children.”

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

MR. CAMPISI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Any comments? (no response)

Thank you so much.

MR. CAMPISI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Next, we'll call Cody Miller. Councilman, right?

COUNCILMAN CODY MILLER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Welcome.

MR. MILLER: I'll try and be brief for everybody. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please; we like to hear the perspective from the Mayor and Council's Board.

MR. MILLER: Good evening. My name is Cody Miller, and I serve as a Councilman in the Township of Monroe. I represent approximately 39,000 residents; we are a town of 48 square miles; and in the next 5 to 10 years, we're probably going to see an increase in our population of, probably, well over 5,000 residents

First off, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak this evening.

Like many others in the room, as we've heard, Monroe is underfunded. We are \$6.6 million short of 100 percent funding, based on the current SFRA; putting us at 84 percent funding. But it gets worse; because of the growth cap, added by the legislature in 2008, we lose another \$15.3 million.

I recognize that nothing can be fixed overnight, but we have to do something; or what was the point of the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 if we don't follow it? It's not us-versus-them; it's about fairness. How could 100 percent not be fair? Every day that we fail to act we are hurting our children; and we see this here, because the underfunded districts are suffering.

Now, I know that money doesn't grow on trees. In Monroe, we're getting ready to introduce a budget with a zero percent tax increase; because we know that our residents are struggling every single day, and with the amount of foreclosures that we see in our town.

But factoring in our potential increases with our school system -- about 3 percent -- and our county tax, our savings are basically a wash for our residents this year.

Now, I know it's a tough budget in Trenton, and it's going to take time to get everyone to 100 percent. But why not start the effort now to make it more fair, slowly? Why not take the first step?

I am so glad to hear that the Senate is going to try and do something to fix this. But what is the excuse to do nothing? As a Councilman, I know it's hard to make everyone happy. I get it. But we also have to do the right thing, and fixing this is the right thing. With my

two years in local government, there's one thing that I've learned about governance and politics: Good policy is always good politics.

I applaud you for having these hearings, and I look forward to you fixing this problem, so we are not in the same predicament that we are in again next year.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Anyone have any comments? (no response)

Thank you, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN MILLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mark Schonewise.

MARK SCHONEWISE: Hello. My name is Mark Schonewise and I am a current member of the East Greenwich Board of Education, which is a sending district to Kingsway.

My wife is also a teacher at Kingsway which, laying off 29 teachers, makes me a little nervous.

But that being said, I think the one thing to point out here is, the problem is clear and the solution is with you. Nobody behind me can help fix this; it's up to you, the Senate, and the Governor. And I think what really bothers me is, for the last seven years, there's been no plan, no emergency plan, and it's the same argument over and over.

I can tell you East Greenwich is suffering. I'm not going to say they're suffering more than Chesterfield or Cherry Hill, because that's not fair. I also can't go to Wenonah, where I grew up, and say, "You're at 183 percent; give us some."

If you want to know what the funding is, I suggest you go to *Formula4Successnj.com*. There you can pull up every district by county, and it will show you where they are as far as funding and with growth. And to correct somebody, I think Chesterfield was at 9 percent, not 11 percent.

But the thing that really bothers me is that it's been said before -- like the district next to me gets \$6,000 more per student. But there are other added costs. There's the cost of field trips for parents with more than two kids. There's the cost of fundraising where -- we have a Home and School Association that raises \$50,000; but that money comes from the same taxpayers that it's trying to help.

So it's more than just property tax, and it's more than just the cost. It's what it's doing to all the situations as far as competing with other schools. We shouldn't have to compete with Kingsway or a Cherry Hill to get our funds; it should be done for us.

If I'm a parent, I don't ask my wife to wait seven years to make a decision on how to fund our child's education. It has to be done within a certain time. I think it's well beyond the point of time and well beyond fair that nothing has been done to address this situation.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you for your comments.

Any questions or any comments? (no response)

Thank you.

We've concluded the list of individuals who had signed up previously. So we're going to start with the sign-up sheet that was at the table.

It's a long sign-up sheet; there are about four pages of it. So I'll be honest with you; I don't think we're going to get to everyone, but we will try.

The first one who we have is Joy Boehm.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike):
When we came in, they said sign to show that you are here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Oh. (laughter)

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Yes, that's right. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Okay, so let's see if we can do something.

How about we do this? Who's here -- who signed up just to show that they were here?

Okay; so why don't we have a show of hands of who'd like to address this Committee. We'll go this way -- keep-- You know; please.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike)
Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: You all scared me. (Laughter)

C H A R L E S B U C H H E I M: Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

My name is Charles Buchheim; I'm the Vice President of the Board of Education for the Runnemede School District. I also sit on the Camden County Educational Services Commission as a member of that Board; and also serve as a delegate to the New Jersey School Board Association. And finally, I served 34 years in public education; my last 18

years as Principal here at Camden County Technical School. So my heart and soul is in education.

I, first, want to address the people sitting behind me; because I don't think the people in Trenton realize the sacrifices and the magic that we do in our local school districts to make things work when our budgets are frozen.

So let me give you an example -- and I would like to come from a different perspective -- of some of the things all of our districts have had to do for the last seven or eight years.

Our District received a \$1,000 (*sic*) ROD grant. We have three schools in our District; we have 840 students. Two of our schools are five years short of being 100 years old.

We received a ROD grant for \$1 million because of work that needed to be done on our two older schools. We were supposed to receive that money in August -- last August. To date, we have received \$200,000 of the \$1 million grant that we were awarded. We have had to freeze funding in our District, which means we've had to do without, or reduce staff.

PARCC testing: When PARCC testing began, a requirement was to have a computer for every child. We're a small district, a K-8. We had to purchase 200 additional computers; no additional funding from the State of New Jersey.

We average about 12 to 18 students annually who go to out-of-school districts at approximately \$40,000 a student; and the busing was running us \$12,000 to \$15,000 a student a year. We went out and bought two small buses, because it was cheaper for us to transport our own children

than to go out on contract to get these children to the schools they needed to go to.

We have two pieces of property in our town. Runnemedede is more than 300 years old. We have two pieces of property left in our community where we could build a new school complex, which we direly need. We sat down with our architects; and to do that, we're looking at \$45 million. That means the average tax increase to the citizens in our community is over \$800 additional. They cannot afford it.

We have been talking to America (indiscernible). We have, probably, 40 to 60 homes right now that have been lost to bankruptcies and foreclosures.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: I'm sorry, how many homes?

MR. BUCHHEIM: Over 40.

So if you can imagine raising taxes another \$800 -- how many more homes would be lost?

We've become a sustainable Jersey school district. We have cut the use of paper in our District to save money. We don't buy textbooks any longer for grades 4-8; every one of our students has a Chromebook. Every textbook is in that book -- in that computer.

Again, every district sitting behind me has used creativity because of this flat-funding. We can't do it forever. We need fair school funding, as the Mayor of Deptford Township so eloquently put.

And again, I want to thank this Committee for allowing me to address you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Any comments or--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: No, I just want to -- I just would like to mention how important your efforts are. And I think all of us appreciate the efforts of every educator, family member, Superintendent, Administrator in the room.

But Camden City is one of my communities in my District. I was so glad to see the gentleman here to speak to the needs of the children in Camden. And it would lose money, as would one other community in the 5th Legislative District. So this isn't about politicians watching out for their own; it's about educating our children -- which you have laid out before us brilliantly -- and the fact that many teachers make sacrifices every day, dollars and cents. So we have fascinating districts -- the 5th District is one of them -- it's the City of Camden; and in Camden County it's right down the Pike towns. When I as a Freeholder, I used to be called the *Pike Chick*, because I came from Barrington, which was between the White Horse and Black Horse Pikes.

So I understand it. And Gloucester County is another very important part of our District; a little bit more rural, a little different -- still in grave need, as we heard from Deptford Township today; and as I mentioned for Woodbury.

It's extraordinary what we're hearing all over the State of New Jersey; just extraordinary. I don't know how we got here, but somehow, together, we're going to pull ourselves out.

MR. BUCHHEIM: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Please; go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Excuse me, sir.

May I ask you one quick question?

MR. BUCHHEIM: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you.

It's a little bit off-topic, but you mentioned it, so I hope I can ask you.

You mentioned that you don't use books; you use Chromebooks.

MR. BUCHHEIM: Chromebook, for grades 4-8. All the textbooks are on that. So it's also saving the backs of these kids.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: May I ask-- Oh, I didn't want to interrupt you. Please go ahead.

MR. BUCHHEIM: No, go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Would you tell me how you feel, from your personal experience, how that works? Is that well received?

MR. BUCHHEIM: Yes. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Do you -- are you able to monitor how much time they're actually spending reading and all that stuff?

MR. BUCHHEIM: Yes, and they actually take the Chromebooks home with them, and can actually sign them out over the summer to continue their educational experiences.

I started in education in 1972 as a teacher at Cherry Hill West. And things have changed since 1972, and how education is coming to those children. I think the use of iPads-- My daughter is a teacher in the Voorhees School District. I think they use iPads there, Chromebooks. What's nice about that is your textbooks are current and updated. Being a teacher myself in the classroom, your textbooks get dated. When you're

using technology now, if the textbook is revised the coming year -- that new class coming into 4th grade has the most current textbook to use.

So I think that's a move in the right direction, and it saves us money. The average cost of a book is \$75 to \$100.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: No, I just thought the absence of that tactile -- holding the pages and turning-- But that's I guess--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: That's our time, Bob.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Yes; I'm just dating myself.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: That's when we were young.

MR. BUCHHEIM: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you very much.

MR. BUCHHEIM: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Sir.

J A M E S M U E L L E R: Good evening.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Good evening; welcome.

MR. MUELLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Make sure you state your name for the record.

MR. MUELLER: Yes; good evening, Committee. My name is James Mueller. I am the Board President of Education for the Kingsway Regional School District. I'm also a past Board member of the East Greenwich School District.

I'll be short in my testimony. I know you have a very difficult job.

I testified during the Senate hearing in Kingsway, and we appreciate what you're doing; we appreciate the hard work that's ahead of you. But please understand that the parents and the residents of the communities that are specifically underfunded -- and I mean significantly underfunded; I'm talking East Greenwich, I'm talking Kingsway, I'm talking the other ones that have spoken here this evening. This is a financial strain on the school districts; it's a financial strain on the Administration; a financial strain on the teachers; and a financial strain on the kids.

And I'm an Army veteran; I'm a National Guard veteran; I took the oath of the United States when I got elected to the Board of Education, I took the oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the State of New Jersey. You, as elected official, have done so as well. There's a law in place; there's a formula in place. I would ask that you revisit the provisions of that that are unfair; and, really, quite frankly, handcuffing all of us from providing a fair and equitable education.

But that's all I'll say. And I wish you the best of luck, as I know it's not easy.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

MR. MULLER: But thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Any one -- any comments?

MR. MUELLER: Any comments? (no response)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you so much.

MR. MUELLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please, sir.

Good evening.

JORDEN SCHIFF Ed. D.: Good evening.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: And welcome.

DR. SCHIFF: Thank you.

I drove all the way down from Hillsborough in order to make it. I wasn't going to leave without testifying.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Don't worry; I came down from Bergen County. We're good. (laughter) It's all in the family.

DR. SCHIFF: I'm going to make my comments brief. I give you my testimony, for the record.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

DR. SCHIFF: I am going to refer to some charts that are actually a part of the testimony; so I ask that you get that handout.

Good evening. My name is Jordan Schiff; I am the proud Superintendent of Hillsborough Township Public Schools. I also serve as the President for the Garden State Coalition of Schools, as well as the Chair of the Legislative Committee for NJASA.

And I appreciate you inviting comments on school funding.

What you have in front of you is a document that kind of goes through some of the history; where we currently are with funding. And I'd like to spend the three-and-a-half -- or the three minutes of my testimony focusing on some possible solutions that I hope that you would consider.

So the first chart, on page 3 -- if you would take a look at that -- illustrates, from Fiscal Year 2013 to Fiscal Year 2017, the percentage increase of the State budget as whole, as compared to the increases of direct aid to schools. And that's what we're talking about here. How much

money is in direct aid to schools? The percentage increases from year, after year, after year, have been much smaller for direct aid to public schools than the entire growth of the State budget.

Now, we all know that budgets are a reflection of our priorities, right? So if we had the same priority for our students' education as we did for anything else, those bars would be the same. If we go up by 3 percent on the State budget, we would go up 3 percent on direct aid to schools.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mr. Schiff, if I could just interrupt for a minute.

DR. SCHIFF: Please; yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: The red bars are the--

DR. SCHIFF: Direct aid to schools, okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --direct aid; right. Perfect.

DR. SCHIFF: And the blue bars--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Is the growth.

DR. SCHIFF: --are the increases of the total State budget. That's percentage increase. If you look at the next group of charts there -- that's actually dollar increases from Fiscal Year 2013 through Fiscal Year 2017. I draw your attention to Fiscal Year 2016. The increased new monies in the State budget was \$1 billion; *billion* with a *B*. The increase to State aid, during that period of time, was zero. It didn't increase a penny.

There's a moral and ethical imperative that we prioritize the students of this state, at least proportionally to the revenue that we see, as a district as a whole. We heard a lot of testimony today about hold-harmless aid and the other very, very difficult situations that districts throughout the state are dealing with right now. But a couple of quick numbers. If we total

up all of the overfunded districts, that's about \$600 million. If you total up all of the underfunded district in the State of New Jersey, it's about \$2 billion. So if you took that \$600 million and you subtracted that from the \$2 billion, you're still about \$1.4 billion -- billion; I'm sorry--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: It's a long night.

DR. SCHIFF: --underfunded. So the question is, how do we make this work?

Now, I challenge this Committee to think about this one thing. If we defunded those schools that are overfunded and brought them to 100 percent, that's over \$600 million of either teacher, staff members, or others that would need to be reduced out of those 200 districts; or increases in property taxes by over \$600 million in those particular communities also; or a combination of the two. We have to be careful about that.

But clearly -- very, very clearly -- when we have new monies -- and we do have new monies, but the State is not prioritizing kids -- there are districts -- and we heard about some of them tonight -- that are very much underfunded, that are taxing above the local fair share, and are spending below adequacy. Those districts must go to the front of the line. That, by the way, is not my District. Those districts must go to the front of the line.

But it can't be done by just simply shifting monies around. You need additional monies -- and I'm trying to make the argument to you that those monies are there; we're just making choices about which priorities to fund. Right now, the priorities are for adults, not for children, in this state. And it hasn't been for seven years.

I encourage you to think about that.

Now, what I've also shown you as part of this are a couple of other ideas. The first idea is that, look, the State can't do it alone. You need help from your local communities in order to do that. There needs to be a loosening of the 2 percent property tax cap; the State can't do it alone. And who best to make the decisions about taxation policy in your local districts but those school board members -- many of them are here -- who live in their community, understand the tax impact, and will be held accountable by their local communities? Not that they would raise taxes; but they would at least have the choice whether or not to raise taxes.

And I'll give you a Hillsborough Township issue. This year I had to cut 10 teachers out of the budget; 10. We went to the 2 percent cap; we took all of the waivers that we could, at that point. We basically taxed to our statutory maximum. The average homeowner in Hillsborough Township -- their taxes went up by \$40 for the year; \$40, and we cut 10 teachers.

Now, our School Board should have had the opportunity to make the decision, "No, I'm not going to cut 10 teachers. We'll cut 5 and raise the taxes by \$80 a year, rather than \$40." They didn't even have that choice. That's something that needs to change.

Two other very quick things that I want to share with -- I know that time is up -- but two other quick things that are cost containment measures that help reduce expenditures within our districts.

Special education is some of the most important investments that we make for our neediest kids in our districts. But there is a great deal of growth in that, and it's above the 2 percent. And let me just share this with you very quickly. Right now, there are families that have children who

have severe disabilities that are receiving services that would be covered by their private insurance carriers. They're already paying for those premiums. If the district pays all out-of-district expenses, but private insurance carriers cover those costs for related special education services, that would be huge, huge -- hundreds of millions of dollars of savings across this entire state; very important for us to consider that -- number one.

Number two -- ESCs -- Educational Services Commissions -- and this is my last point; excuse me. ESC -- Education Services Commissions -- their mission is to provide -- part of their mission is to provide services that are not able to be provided in the local districts. And what I've provided you, on the last page of the handout, is a comparison of similar services between ESCs and private -- at times, for-profit -- out-of-district special needs schools. And you can see that the differences between what ESCs can provide and what's being provided by private Abbott district placements is significant. And the savings is per-student there, on that particular sheet.

So I know we spent a lot of time identifying the problem; we wanted to offer some possible solutions to address those problems.

I thank you for your patience.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Actually, I appreciate it, because what you had mentioned before about insurance premiums being paid in special education -- those are items that have not been discussed before. But I'm glad that you have touched upon it this evening.

DR. SCHIFF: And by the way, we're already doing it for children on Medicaid. Every child who receives Medicaid -- we have a

SEMI program -- Special Education Medicaid Initiative -- that's already happening for poor children. Why couldn't it happen for all children?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Any comments or questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: I have a question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: Thank you so much for being here.

But there's something that you said -- and I hope that you can repeat -- the total amount of students who are underfunded, you said they-- What was it, *billion*?

DR. SCHIFF: Two billion dollars; if you total up all of the districts that are beneath a 100 percent funding, it's about \$2 billion of underfunding.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: And then, what was the other figure that you mentioned?

DR. SCHIFF: About \$600 million in overfunding, and that statistic had been mentioned before.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MOSQUERA: Thank you very much. I just wanted to make sure; I have to jot that down. It's a very alarming statistic. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Any other--

Bob, go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Mr. Schiff, thank you very much for your testimony; very illuminating.

Just one thing -- back to your chart -- chart No. 1 -- where you referenced the difference in the spending of -- the budget, as opposed to the spending. Some of that -- and I'm not saying it's your fault, but I guess it's everybody's fault -- a lot of that is payment to pensions and covering bonding costs.

DR. SCHIFF: Yes; absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: It's a tremendous amount. The Governor had a pretty big chunk of change in his last budget, and he put it all towards pensions--

DR. SCHIFF: Correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: --the unfunded pension and healthcare liability to the State Police. So that's the competing actors in the budget, I think, to some degree.

DR. SCHIFF: Right. I would just mention that it's a false choice to say, "We fund pensions, or we fund the education for our students." We need, and we must, do both.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: I understand that. So my suggestion-- You have a fan there (laughter) --

DR. SCHIFF: That's one.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: I don't think that's the only one.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Super fan.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: So you came out with some suggestions -- and you seem like you're a problem solver, which I like -- in your testimony. So if that's the case and we need to fund both, what would be your recommendation to the panel, here, to do this?

DR. SCHIFF: Yes, sir. There's \$9 billion that's currently budgeted for direct aid to schools. A 2 percent increase on \$9 billion is \$180 million. We have put in-- And to the Governor's credit, by the way, he has put more, during his tenure, into the public pensions than the past previous three or four Governors combined.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Yes.

DR. SCHIFF: So I absolutely recognize that. But it can't be at the expense of direct aid for our kids. And we see some of the problems that this underfunding-- It's just wreaking havoc. We shouldn't just be talking about how do we cut up the existing pie; but how do we grow the pie in a way that that allows us to be sustainable.

And when you have a moment, look at the chart that I shared with you on the NAEP results. These are the results that show how well we perform, relative to every other state in the country. And I suggest to you that if you look carefully at the 4th grade reading and math, these younger kids -- who have been affected by all of the divestment in public education in this state -- we're starting to see it drop. Now, I'm not sure that's a causal relationship; but it should give us pause.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN AUTH: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Just a comment.

We just did a huge revenue reducer in our state, to the tune -- as it plays itself out, with eliminating the estate tax, reducing sales taxes by a bit, pension taxes -- we just reduced it, in the next few years, by \$1.4 billion. So I'm going to invest in a printing machine, and I'm going to start

one in my basement. Because I don't know how we make up these revenues; I absolutely cannot imagine how we do it.

The pension requirement is huge and necessary; we made a commitment to people, just like we've made a commitment to educate our children. And I think the State term is *thorough and efficient*. Some are getting it and some are not. And how we make that up with less revenue is beyond me.

But we're going to grapple with it; we're going to keep fighting with it to try and get our hands around it, I can assure you.

DR. SCHIFF: Big issue: The economy needs to grow. And we have anemic growth in New Jersey; kind of falling behind almost every other state in our country--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Which is why we have so many foreclosures.

DR. SCHIFF: If we-- Well, just think about it this way. One percent on about \$35 billion -- which is our State budget -- is about \$350 million; \$350 million is almost twice the amount that I am suggesting would be a 2 percent increase; 1 percent is twice -- if we grew another half percent, we could do this; we could do this. I think we must do it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Well, I thank you for the facts that you brought to us -- some interesting facts, and a possible solution.

DR. SCHIFF: I'm available for any assistance that I can provide.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Mr. Schiff.

DR. SCHIFF: Yes; thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Please.

SUE ALTMAN: Hi, there; I'll be quick. It's late, and it's a Tuesday.
(laughter)

My name is Sue Altman, and I am a City of Camden of resident
-- so, hello.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Hi.

MS. ALTMAN: I'm one of your constituents.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes, you are.

MS. ALTMAN: So I just want to echo-- I mean, I have been
-- my heart has been breaking for all of the school districts that haven't
been able to fund the stuff they want to fund and the programs they want
to fund. I think that's terrible.

I'm particularly concerned about the Chris Christie plan that's,
like, looming over -- in the far corners of the universe. And that makes me
super nervous.

So as a City of Camden resident, I know firsthand that that
type of plan would devastate Camden, and any school that couldn't cover
its budget through its own taxpayer base. So that makes me really nervous.

And what makes me nervous about this process-- And I was at
the Senate hearing down in Kingsway -- and a shout-out to Kingsway; you
guys are amazing; really stellar. I loved visiting your school, it was really
great. But I was down there, and I was worried that this process was just
taking so long. And I don't quite know the timing of it all; but I think what
makes me most nervous is that we don't move quickly on this thing. And I
am a firm believer in we need to fund the formula. And I echo that
gentleman's statement -- that we need to find a way to do it. But I'm
worried that if we don't move quickly enough, that Christie plan could

somehow become like a reality, like a real thing. And that makes me really nervous.

You say “no,” but I don’t know; I’m nervous, I’m nervous.

And then, finally, I think the up swell of resentment and frustration by what happened in the Federal government today -- the Betsy DeVos nomination and her confirmation -- I think means that we really need to build a moat around New Jersey; like, we need to batten down the hatches. We have to take care of our own; we have to fund our schools with generosity; we have to find the money, because if we don’t, I don’t know who will.

So I would just advocate for a full funding effort, as best we can; find the money, please, and do it quickly. Get to that table, figure it out, because our students depend on you.

So thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor; good evening.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Good evening, Madam Chair and Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be able to address you tonight, and for the efforts that you’re putting forward to, hopefully, find a solution to this problem.

First, I would like to speak on behalf of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors, which has taken this task on because we recognize the importance of what school funding does, not only for schools, but for our property taxpayers across the state.

Both the League and the Conference of Mayors are watching this issue carefully. The Conference of Mayors has stepped up to engage, and we offer our help wherever we can, representing over 500 mayors throughout the state.

So with that said, I'll take that hat off, and I'll make some personal observations.

You know, tonight we have heard -- I have heard a tremendous amount of casualties; really, heartbreaking stories about problems that these school districts are facing. I'm very proud of the school districts that we have in our community, but I know the challenges that they face.

And I guess your task is to go throughout the state and listen to these. But I believe that you're probably already hearing a repetitive pattern; and you're looking for, maybe, that magic bullet, that silver lining, whatever it may be.

I suggest to you that we already have an example of why the problem exists. It is not a failure of the formula; it is a failure of the implementation of the formula. It is a failure of funding it. And we have two very clear examples of other avenues where the failure of funding has created havoc with the State: pensions -- because our county government and our municipal government do not have problems with the pension system, because we have been funding it all along. The State has the problem because they have chosen not to fund it.

The second issue is the Transportation Trust Fund, which we all suffer from because it was a failure to fund it properly.

So if you're looking for a cause, the cause is the funding cause. You have a solution; you already have the mechanism in place. I suggest do

not look for the grand slam, because we all know the money doesn't exist. Let's take a single; a single will get us somewhere. Any small amount-- If we look at the one year that that funding formula was implemented, in 2009, it made a tremendous impact on these districts that received additional funding.

I suggest that rather than continue to research and reinvent the wheel -- because if our forefathers reinvented the wheel, we'd all be walking; we wouldn't be driving -- we have a solution. Let's get to the task and find a way to fund it properly. It is a choice, like the prior speaker said. It's a choice of where you want the money to go. You control those purse strings, along with the Administration. Now is the time to step up and take the action to try to do that.

Our organization will stand ready to help you in any way we can, and certainly do appreciate your efforts.

Thank you for the time to speak.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, if I can ask you; I've asked it before, and several people here have been in favor of it. Would you be in favor of running the school funding formula with whatever monies are put in the budget?

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Yes, absolutely.

It's a step forward. It's that single that we need to have. We can start the ball rolling. We're not going to get the grand slam; the money is not there. But we need to get it rolling. And guess what? Along the way, you'll have time -- which, right now, we've run out of -- you'll have time to look at other avenues to fully fund it in the future, or tweak it. But no one is implementing anything, so now we are on hold. It's been a decade since

the research of your predecessors spent endless hours to come up with this formula back in 2007-2008. I'm sure they went through the same process. So let's not ignore the time and effort that they spent to find a solution by not implementing anything.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: So what you're saying is -- so the ones that need the most would go to the front of the line, as a previous speaker was saying, because most of the school districts-- I mean, I think we all will lose; some will lose more than others. But they're losing already. But according to what you're telling me is, the ones that need the most money would have to be prioritized.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Yes; look, I think that it's really-- I mean, it is a fairness issue, okay? How can we have districts being funded in excess of 100 percent, and others at 40 percent?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Right.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: So let's get those 40 percent people to 60 percent--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Let's get them up--

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Okay? Get them up somewhere, because they need the help.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: Yes.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Because guess what? When they don't get that money, it falls back on us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: It falls on us.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: And where we're-- You know, our Mayors here -- the ones where the rubber meets the road -- we're the ones

who have to watch our taxpayers have to make a choice of buying medicine that they need or paying their taxes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JIMENEZ: We know that.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: That's a crime. And you have the opportunity to fix it, and we're here to help you implement it. But you need to give us the tools to do it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Mayor, let me ask you a question.

With regards to *tools to do it* -- where do you stand with the 2 percent tax cap?

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Look, we all had to deal with it, okay? We all had to tighten up and do it, okay? I think that, unfortunately, there is no room to put latitude into that right now, okay? Because our taxpayers are at the end of their rope, okay? There are other exclusions, you know. I've got bordering towns that have had 23 percent increases in their taxes with a 2 percent tax cap. So how is that happening? So there are methods around the cap that are allowing excess levies. So we need to continue to keep restraint on what we do with our taxes.

Now, there have been a number of studies; the League has looked at this before, on different methodologies in funding education. Because the simple problem is -- and you're not going to fix this one here -- is that we fund education through property taxes. And when we start to look at *can we fund it differently*, then the burden that we're dealing with right now wouldn't be such a burden if there were other avenues to fund it -- if there were more progressive methods to fund education, rather than just property taxes. Because we all know property taxes are a regressive tax, not

a progressive tax. And there have been suggestions over the years to do that, and the legislature has said “no.” The Governors have said “no.” So we need to break through this and find some real solutions; they exist. We have to have the courage to do it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Mayor.

MAYOR PASSANANTE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Anyone else?

Doctor Greene; good to see you.

G. KENNEDY GREENE, Ed. D.: Good to see you as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Seems you and I took a long trip down. (laughter)

DR. GREENE: Yes, yes; as you did, as you did.

I know it’s late; I’m just -- real simple. I’m not going to go through-- You have my testimony from a previous time.

And a lot of great points have been made; you’ve heard a lot of good stories -- good stories and effective stories. Stories that have told you something different about each community.

I would -- I just wanted to say something to address the tax issue, because this tax issue is really important.

I agree with the previous speaker -- the Mayor -- who said that we might find other ways of addressing that issue. However, the problem with the 2 percent, and sticking on the 2 percent tax cap, is that doesn’t impact every community equally. If you’re a community that has a low tax base, only having a 2 percent -- the ability to go up 2 percent is a problem.

And we have communities all over this state that are -- many of whom are contributing well more than their fair share, and others that are

not. And so to say that we can't deal with that through addressing the 2 percent tax cap, I think is misleading. We need to look at the area of making sure that communities fund what they're supposed to locally. And it can't be an excuse that the State takes on their burden by overfunding them, to make up for what they're not providing in their local fair share.

So it's that third leg of the stool, so to speak. It's not just the State aid piece, it's not just budget adequacy. It is local tax effort; and we have a wide variety, I think, as you know, of local tax efforts all over the state. To say that everybody's property taxes are high is inaccurate. Some are, some aren't; and that's a big piece of the puzzle here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Wait, Doctor, let me ask you a question, because I think you and I had discussed this once before.

What about the towns that do not tax at the 2 percent tax cap -- but for less? Should we obligate them to increase their taxes to the 2 percent cap?

DR. GREENE: I think it depends what their local tax effort is now. If you have a town like mine, that is contributing 144 percent of the local fair share -- 44 percent more than their local fair share -- to me, to go and ask them for another 2 percent, and continue to do that when your State aid is at 56 percent -- that's a crime.

But there are other communities that are contributing 50 percent of the local fair share -- 40 percent, 30 percent. Why should they be capped at 2 percent? And I've heard the comment, "Well, the 2 percent cap is just there." Well, we have -- as was stated by the Mayor, there are waivers to the 2 percent cap for extraordinary expenditures, special education, enrollment increases, etc. Why not for a district that is below its

local fair share and, perhaps, also below its budget adequacy, to go above the 2 percent cap to start making up that difference?

Superintendent Dr. Schiff made that point, you know -- that his community, our communities are restricted from doing that now. But -- especially for communities that are well below their local fair share -- that seems like a reasonable solution.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Doctor.

Any comments, questions?

DR. GREENE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: No; I applaud his PowerPoint, his information all the time. He's right on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Doctor, you joined us at every single meeting--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: --and I thank you for that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Absolutely.

DR. GREENE: Well, it's really important. I think that, you know -- I'm glad to be here and watch what's going on. I didn't intend to testify today; I just wanted to make that last point. The people who are here -- and you're feeling what they're feeling in this community, and it's happening all over the state. So I'm glad you're getting all over the state to hear what everybody has to say

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you, Doctor.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JONES: Thank you.

DR. GREENE: I appreciate it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Anyone else?

Please.

Good evening, and welcome.

KAREN CHEW: Good evening.

My name is Karen Chew, and I am a Councilwoman from Chesilhurst. I know our good, esteemed Councilwoman; she was just at our town a few weeks ago. Of course, I've spoken with Pat on another issue.

But I'm also a teacher. I started my career in Camden, and I used the alternate route to get my licensing. So I did not come through any school; I came through the school of life. I got my licensing; started teaching in Camden. I'm currently teaching in Gloucester Township. I was twice voted the Teacher of the Year for Camden, and received a grant this year from NEA to start a robotics program--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Congratulations.

MS. CHEW: --in the middle school in Gloucester.

My classroom reflects what's called *real world education*, and that's because I believe that we do live in a competitive society; and I know what employers are looking for from our students.

I taught, and do teach, ESL students, special needs students; and have done this successfully with no formal training.

I'm saying this because I will be one of the people who will be directly affected by the decisions made in Trenton. Each person who came before you spoke on how there is a major problem with distribution of funding. I came to your quorum before, and we talked about the unequal distribution of funding across the state.

I'm asking that you do not rush into a plan to fix the problems we have now, but look at the trends and select the plan that will be fluid and flexible, and that will stand up to demographic and economic changes for, at least, the next 10 to 20 years.

We cannot look at this as something that we're going to fix now. We need to look at it as what's going to happen in five years. A lot of our towns are growing or shrinking, and we need to look at how this funding is going to be affected by that. We can't expect to have a certain town put out 144 percent this year, and then they have their bases shrink next year. Where is the funding going to come from?

So think about, again, not just what's happening today, but where are we going to be 10 years from now.

That's my only statement.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARIDE: Thank you.

Any comments or questions? (no response)

Thank you so much.

Anyone else wish to address the Committee? (no response)

Well, on that note, then, I want to thank our hosts here at Camden County Technical School. Thank you so much. Please extend our gratitude to the students of the school and for the food that they provided for us. It was delicious.

I want to thank all of you for taking the time to spend the evening with us. Your comments hit all of us, and there are things that I heard here today that I was surprised with, especially with the 133 percent growth anticipated; that's a lot. These comments that you have made here today -- aside from the fact that they've been recorded -- will be taken back

to Trenton, and we will be working on this to make sure that we try to even it out for the taxpayers and for our children; so they have not fallen on deaf ears. We are here to do what we have to do to make sure that we try to make it more palatable for the taxpayer and, definitely, for our students.

On that note, thank you very much. Please drive safely. And again, you're free to reach out to any of us at any time to discuss any issue affecting education, or any other issue, in the state.

Thank you, and good evening.

ALL: Thank you. (applause)

(MEETING CONCLUDED)