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Testimony before the Assembly Budget Committee

Public Hearing

State House Annex – Trenton, NJ

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

By Jane Scarpellino, Member of the Cherry Hill Board of Education

Members of the committee, colleagues, and community members, my name is Jane Scarpellino, and I am a member of the Cherry Hill Board of Education and the parent of a student in the Cherry Hill Public Schools. I would like to thank the members of the committee for allowing me time to address you. I had the honor of attending a recent meeting with Assemblywoman Lampitt and Assemblyman Greenwald regarding our district's funding issues, and would like to thank them for their commitment to the needs of our children and our schools. As member of the Cherry Hill Board of Education and as a concerned citizen, I offer the following testimony.

My family and I relocated to Cherry Hill a little more than a decade ago because of the excellent schools. In terms of our son's knowledge, intellectual and social growth from that time until now, his senior year in high school, that choice has proven to be a good one. But over the years attending parent/teacher conferences,

PTA meetings and other school events, and now as a board member spending in time in all 19 of our school buildings, one thing is abundantly clear: Our buildings are in serious need of repair. Our administrators have wrestled with this issue in the District's annual budget for more than a decade. However, after 10 years of underfunding, our parents are tired of hearing that our focus has been on instruction, quality teachers and outcomes – which are crucial to our success, but in the end are impossible to maintain if we can't address failing roofs, unstable walls, and outdated or broken equipment because of inadequate funding from the state. On December 11, 2018 we asked our community to support a referendum focused on health, safety and security items. They voted against the referendum. We now face the potentially catastrophic consequences of this vote.

I recently took a seat as the Board liaison to the Fair Funding for Cherry Hill Schools Committee. This grassroots committee has done a tremendous amount of work to help restore our school district to its allotted fair funding under the SFRA. Slow progress is happening, and we are glad for our small, incremental increases in state funding. But the fact remains that 91% of Cherry Hill's proposed 2019-2020 budget will come from Cherry Hill tax payers – 91% for the third year in a row. Our community is telling us they have reached the breaking point in taxes. Our demographics have changes substantially. Eight of 19 schools are Title I schools. 20% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch-- up from 15% in 2010. Our community simple can't afford this tax burden any longer. Still, they agree that our facilities' needs cannot wait.

The safety and security of our students and staff are paramount in the Cherry Hill Public Schools. We have a robust mental health support system in place. The

Board of Education last year revised policy to arm our campus police officers. We now employ 9 armed officers and an armed district director of security. We are working to bring all of our buildings' physical security up-to-date. We need more funding to complete these projects as quickly as possible.

As our legislators, you can make this happen – and you must. We have done more with less for far too long. Our children deserve better.