

Testimony of Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D.
Superintendent of the Freehold Borough Public Schools
to the
New Jersey Senate Select Committee on School Funding Fairness
Thursday, February 2, 2017

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to the committee on school funding. Thank you as well for your leadership in attempting to break up the school funding status quo in the state that has for too long resulted in a grossly inequitable distribution of state resources to our public school students.

I lead the Freehold Borough public schools, the third most underfunded district in the state (Attachment 1). We are proud of our students and have a great faculty. I am distressed though that my students are not receiving the resources necessary for a proper education, and that year after year I have to cut more and more of their support as expenses increase and state aid remains flat. This is all the more infuriating when one sees other districts flush with extra cash, providing a multitude of extra services to their students, as well as a healthy dose of tax relief to their taxpayers. This is not fair, this is not right, and we begin to wonder if it is even legal, considering the disparate impact on protected groups of students. What is probably the most amazing fact in this whole situation is that resolving the worst of the disparity wouldn't require one more dollar in state aid.

If the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 were fully implemented in Freehold Borough uncapped and as originally intended, we would have \$13,333,837 more dollars than we do now to operate our district. Translated into different terms, in order to fully operate my district to the requirements of law and regulation, I need minimally fifty more teachers. My class sizes are above required levels, I cannot provide the full level of service to my special education students, my English Language Learner instruction periods are shorter than the state establishes, I have no teachers to provide a basic skills math program, technology is restrained and the median salary of my teaching force is the lowest in the state for our category (Attachment 2). When our state-approved construction opens in September 2018, as funded now, I won't be able to afford to put new teachers in those new classrooms.

Who is responsible for this? Well, I know it is not our local Freehold Borough taxpayers. They are already being taxed \$2,365,855 above their fair share (Attachment 3). We have taken every tax dollar we were allowed to take since 2011. There is no banked cap. The reason we are in such a dire situation is no mystery: our state aid has been held essentially flat since 2010, while our student population has exploded. Even taking into account our excessive local taxing, the district remains under adequate by \$9,567,909 (Attachment 4).

Sadly this situation is not uncommon around the state, even if Freehold Borough is the extreme example. But one wonders why this imbalance is allowed to continue at all. The School Funding Reform Act of 2008 was realistic and anticipated that there might come a point where full funding might not be possible. In the law, I cite here specifically NJSA 18A:7F-52, it contains a provision to proportionally divide available equalization aid between the districts if full funding is not possible. This has not been done.

I think every Superintendent would be delighted if the SFRA were fully funded. But if that can't be done, many of us would advocate that the available funds should be divided proportionally per the formula. That way everyone would share the pain of the missing funding, proportional to what they should have received. But if even that is too hard, for whatever reason, then the only alternative is to take new money and direct it towards eliminating the most extreme cases of underfunding. Sadly, even here the efforts have been tepid. The amount of money directed to Freehold Borough, and underfunded districts like us, totals only \$16,763,431 statewide, which is only two tenths of one percent of the total distribution in state school aid. One has to ask: how hard are we really trying to fix this?

As the day-to-day leaders of our school districts, we Superintendents struggle with underfunding regularly. We have made the case for equity and fairness per the law, but we have been unsuccessful in changing the dynamics of how money is getting to the districts. In Freehold Borough, last week our insurance broker has alerted us to plan for a 15% increase in our health benefit costs. If we are flat funded again later this month, we will have to make even further drastic cuts to our barebones condition for FY 18. That is why we are at a point where we can't be silent.

Freehold Borough is part of a loose coalition of Superintendents that have been studying this situation and strategizing on how to get a meaningful resolution. Testifying here and before the Assembly Education Committee has been one approach. Writing directly to the Governor and to the Commissioner of Education has been another. Most recently, we have been attracted to the legal initiatives of the Kingsway Regional School District and I intend to recommend to my Board of Education that we join their efforts to address this problem through the judiciary. Our students are being harmed now and will face greater harm going forward if things do not change. That is why we have petitioned the executive branch, that is why we have testified to the legislative branch, and that is also why we will seek to make common cause with similarly affected districts and seek judicial relief. We can't stop until this is fixed.

Freehold Borough and districts like us (those who are under adequate, over fair share on their levy and receiving no hold harmless aid), we need relief now. We are backed into a corner and our school children are being adversely impacted. We applaud this committee's stated purpose in trying to fix all of this, and we will do all we can to support you in this effort. It is our fervent hope that you succeed in returning equity and fairness back to New Jersey school funding. Our students, teachers, and community are depending on you and we very much appreciate your efforts.

Thank you.

Attachments:

- 1.) Funding per Weighted Pupil
- 2.) Median Teacher Pay List
- 3.) School Aid
- 4.) Under Adequacy

Attachment 1
 Extract from NJ Education Law Center
 2015-2016 Calculation of SFRA Data

Funding per Weighted Pupil: Statewide Data

District	County	Enrollment	Weighted Enroll	% At Risk Only	% LEP & At Risk	% LEP only	% Special Education	Funding per Pupil	Funding per Weighted Pupil
State Total		1,316,783	1,973,019	35%	4%	1%	17%	\$16,497	\$11,010
Fairview Boro	Bergen	1,801	3,234	71%	9%	2%	19%	\$11,776	\$6,558
East Newark ..	Hudson	405	708	74%	13%	3%	12%	\$11,903	\$6,809
Freehold Boro	Monmouth	1,656	2,842	63%	17%	0%	19%	\$12,204	\$7,111
Prospect Par..	Passaic	834	1,412	74%	2%	2%	18%	\$12,561	\$7,419
Guttenberg T..	Hudson	1,286	2,125	71%	10%	1%	9%	\$12,376	\$7,490
Hammonton ..	Atlantic	2,756	4,230	39%	6%	0%	17%	\$11,531	\$7,513
South River B..	Middlesex	2,315	3,604	44%	4%	2%	18%	\$11,827	\$7,597
Bound Brook ..	Somerset	1,691	2,828	65%	11%	1%	13%	\$12,741	\$7,619
Bayonne City	Hudson	9,264	14,997	61%	3%	0%	15%	\$12,381	\$7,648
Fairfield Twp	Cumberland	531	856	76%	3%	0%	12%	\$12,783	\$7,929
Red Bank Boro	Monmouth	1,392	2,326	51%	32%	1%	13%	\$13,286	\$7,951
Clayton Boro	Gloucester	1,355	2,237	53%	3%	1%	21%	\$13,140	\$7,959

Median Teacher Pay List
 Extract from NJ Taxpayer Guide to Efficient Spending 2016 Indicator 16
 (Attachment 2)

	County	District	2015-2016	
			Median Teacher Salary	Salary Ranking Within Group
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	FREEHOLD BORO	\$50,915	1
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	TINTON FALLS	\$52,484	2
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	RED BANK BORO	\$53,678	3
D. K-8 / 751 +	HUDSON	GUTTENBERG TOWN	\$53,790	4
D. K-8 / 751 +	HUNTERDON	CLINTON TWP	\$53,892	5
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	NORTHFIELD CITY	\$54,134	6
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	RUNNEMEDE BORO	\$54,718	7
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	MOUNT HOLLY TWP	\$54,804	8
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	FAIR HAVEN BORO	\$55,283	9
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	HAMILTON TWP	\$55,611	10
D. K-8 / 751 +	SOMERSET	GREEN BROOK TWP	\$56,430	11
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	FREEHOLD TWP	\$56,555	12
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	SHAMONG TWP	\$56,896	13
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	EDGEWATER PARK TWP	\$56,920	14
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	STRATFORD BORO	\$56,951	15
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	HALEDON BORO	\$57,295	16
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	FAIRVIEW BORO	\$57,405	17
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	SOMERS POINT CITY	\$57,561	18
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	RINGWOOD BORO	\$57,765	19
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	FLORHAM PARK BORO	\$57,854	20
D. K-8 / 751 +	WARREN	GREENWICH TWP	\$57,961	21
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	BERLIN BORO	\$58,040	22
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	CHESTER TWP	\$58,870	23
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	DENVILLE TWP	\$59,033	24
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	EATONTOWN BORO	\$60,043	25
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	WESTAMPTON	\$60,063	26
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	UPPER SADDLE RIVER BORO	\$60,425	27
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	LINCOLN PARK BORO	\$60,825	28
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	MILLSTONE TWP	\$61,000	29
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	LITTLE SILVER BORO	\$61,045	30
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	LONG HILL TWP	\$61,300	31
D. K-8 / 751 +	CUMBERLAND	UPPER DEERFIELD TWP	\$61,416	32
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	BELLMAWR BORO	\$62,010	33
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	MAYWOOD BORO	\$62,100	34
D. K-8 / 751 +	GLOUCESTER	LOGAN TWP	\$62,341	35
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	EAST HANOVER TWP	\$62,413	36
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	WOODCLIFF LAKE BORO	\$62,480	37
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	WHARTON BORO	\$62,575	38
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	WASHINGTON TWP	\$62,630	39
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAPE MAY	UPPER TWP	\$62,665	40
D. K-8 / 751 +	HUNTERDON	READINGTON TWP	\$62,670	41
D. K-8 / 751 +	SUSSEX	BYRAM TWP	\$62,724	42
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	WOODLAND PARK	\$63,020	43
D. K-8 / 751 +	SOMERSET	BRANCHBURG TWP	\$63,445	44
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	MANALAPAN-ENGLISHTON BORO	\$63,569	45
D. K-8 / 751 +	HUNTERDON	FLEMINGTON-RARITAN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$63,610	46
D. K-8 / 751 +	SUSSEX	SUSSEX-WANTAGE REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$64,498	47
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	TOWA BORO	\$64,883	48
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	ROCKAWAY TWP	\$65,095	49
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	PROSPECT PARK BORO	\$65,100	50
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	LITTLE FALLS TWP	\$65,210	51
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	ABSECON CITY	\$65,453	52
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	VOORHEES TWP	\$65,646	53
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	EVEESHAM TWP	\$65,754	54
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	COLTS NECK TWP	\$65,916	55
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	LINWOOD CITY	\$66,108	56
D. K-8 / 751 +	PASSAIC	WANAUKE BORO	\$66,245	57
D. K-8 / 751 +	CAMDEN	GLOUCESTER TWP	\$66,475	58
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	HILLSDALE BORO	\$66,728	59
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	WYCKOFF TWP	\$66,838	60
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	RUMSON BORO	\$66,970	61
D. K-8 / 751 +	WARREN	LOPATCONG TWP	\$67,002	62
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	HOWELL TWP	\$67,500	63
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	MONTVALE BORO	\$67,572	64
D. K-8 / 751 +	MORRIS	HANOVER TWP	\$67,594	65
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	GALLOWAY TWP	\$68,623	66
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	FRANKLIN LAKES BORO	\$69,022	67
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	LITTLE FERRY BORO	\$69,112	68
D. K-8 / 751 +	MONMOUTH	MARLBORO TWP	\$69,320	69
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	LUMBERTON TWP	\$70,250	70
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	MEDFORD TWP	\$70,384	71
D. K-8 / 751 +	BURLINGTON	MOUNT LAUREL TWP	\$71,590	72
D. K-8 / 751 +	SOMERSET	WARREN TWP	\$72,140	73
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	OAKLAND BORO	\$73,275	74
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	ALLENDALE BORO	\$75,030	75
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	RIVER VALE TWP	\$78,270	76
D. K-8 / 751 +	ATLANTIC	VENTNOR CITY	\$82,196	77
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	CLOSTER BORO	\$87,377	78
D. K-8 / 751 +	BERGEN	EAST RUTHERFORD BORO	\$90,600	79

Attachment 3

Extract from Freehold Boro 2016-17 State School Aid Notice

STATE OF NEW JERSEY - DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 DIVISION OF FIELD SERVICES
 OFFICE OF SCHOOL FINANCE
 2016-17 STATE SCHOOL AID
 EQUALIZATION AID

02/16/2016 3

COUNTY: 25-MONMOUTH
 DISTRICT: 1640-FREEHOLD BORO
 BUDGET: K-8

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ADEQUACY BUDGET CALCULATION:
 ***** REGULAR EDUCATION *****

Projected Weighted Base Enrollment 1,712 (A)
 Total Base Cost
 - @ \$11009 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 Projected Weighted At-Risk Only Enrollment 460 (C)
 Total At-Risk Only Cost
 - @ \$11009 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 Projected Weighted LEP Only Enrollment 5 (E)
 Total LEP Only Cost
 - @ \$11009 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 Projected Weighted combined LEP & Low Income Enrollment 186 (G)
 Total Combined LEP & Low Income Cost
 - @ \$11009 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 Special Education Enrollment 252 (I)
 - FTE Resident Enrollment @ 14.92%
 Total Special Education Cost 2,848,262 (J)
 - @ \$17,034 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 times Item (I) times 2/3
 Speech Only Enrollment 28 (K)
 - FTE Resident Enrollment @ 1.630%
 Total Speech Only Cost 32,299 (L)
 - @ \$1,159 per pupil
 times GCA 0.99530
 times Item (K)

ADEQUACY BUDGET -
 Item (B) + (D) + (F) + (H) + (J) + (L) \$28,772,561 (M)

LOCAL SHARE CALCULATION - REGULAR DISTRICT

Equalized Valuation (10/1/2015) 723,750,603 (N)
 District Income (2013) 170,105,393 (O)
 Equalized Val. x 0.013156218 / 2 4,760,910 (P-1)
 District Income x 0.046185507 / 2 3,928,202 (P-2)
 Local Fair Share : Item(P-1) + Item(P-2) 8,689,112 (P)

LOCAL SHARE - COUNTY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

County Local Shares 1,416,090,455 (Q)
 County Adequacy Budgets 1,418,787,637 (R)
 Item(Q) / Item(R) 0.9981 (S)

Local Share
 Item(S) x Item(M) - for Vocs Only 0 (T)

EQUALIZATION AID CALCULATION

Adequacy Budget (Item(M)) 28,772,561 (U)
 Local Fair Share (Item (P) or (T)) 8,689,112 (V)
 EQUALIZATION AID
 (Item(U) less Item(V)) \$20,083,449 (W)

District Performed Calculations (Not a Part of Notice)		
<u>Underfunded in State Aid</u>		
Equalization Aid Due from State	\$ 20,083,449	From W Above
Equalization Aid Received	8,149,685	
	<u>\$ 11,933,764</u>	Amount Underfunded in State Aid
<u>Over Fair Share of Tax Levy</u>		
Local Fair Share	\$ 8,689,112	From V above
Actual Tax Levy	11,054,967	
	<u>\$ (2,365,855)</u>	Amount Paid Over Local Fair Share

Attachment 4

Extract from FY 17 NJ Department of Education Calculation of District Status

District Status Above, At, or Below Expected Local Levy

Line	Name	Amount	Description
A	2016-17 General Fund Levy	11,054,967	
B	Equalization Aid	8,149,685	
C	Total Budgeted Adequacy Spending (A + B)	19,204,652	
D	District Adequacy Budget	28,772,561	
E	Excess Amount (C - D)	-9,567,909	
	Status		The proposed budget is at or below the expected local levy
	Explanation (only if Line E is positive)		