

My name is _____, a resident of South Harrison Township in Gloucester County. I am reaching out hoping to open up dialogue regarding the “fair funding” approach that was put in place a few years ago. This funding approach is crippling many small districts like ours, while offering no alternative to make up for the loss of funding. I am witnessing the negative effects of the continuous loss of funding to the South Harrison Township School district where my children attend.

New Jersey has stated that many school districts were “overfunded” and that the taxpayers of these towns were not paying their fair share, which resulted in a reduction to the state aid that was allocated. Additionally, the funding formula decreased funding even further by tying it to student enrollment. If the state makes a formula whose purpose is to determine the fair share of the community which changes the state’s obligation, but then handcuffs the community so that they can’t make up this loss of state aid and pay their fair share, the results are disastrous. I can personally speak to the results that are impacting the South Harrison Township School District. Based on the equalization aid formula South Harrison Township is losing at least \$750,766 in funding through the fiscal year 2024. As a result, we have had consistent administrative and staff turnover, loss of staffing positions, larger class sizes, and removal of academic and extracurricular supports. All of these issues are negatively impacting student learning.

In December of 2019, S4289 and the companion assembly bill would have provided an exemption to the 2% property tax levy cap for certain school districts that are spending below adequacy and also seeing a reduction in state educational funding due to the enactment of school funding legislation. The legislation was sponsored by Senate President Sweeney, who worked closely with the Governor’s Office on the plan to correct years of inequitable funding of New Jersey’s schools and resulted in the new funding formula. Senator Sweeney clearly recognized that there was an error in the passage of the funding formula when combined with the 2% cap. In January of 2020, Governor Murphy vetoed this legislation, making it virtually impossible for districts that are losing state funding to bring their districts up to adequacy.

It is clear that the state of New Jersey has an agenda with these small districts that are continuing to lose money each year. The consolidation feasibility law that was signed by the Governor in January of this year makes clear the intention is to force small districts like ours to consolidate. We are currently participating in a consolidation feasibility study. We are also using shared services with another elementary district as a cost saving measure. We are doing our part. But while the study continues and the results wait to be seen and possibly acted upon, our district continues to lose state aid with no recourse. What alternatives can the state suggest? We need your help to

encourage state officials to re-evaluate the current funding formula along with a revision to the funding loss timeline. Consideration around this timeline should extend additional years to allow an opportunity to offset some of the loss through taxpayer contribution. In turn, this would alleviate some of the severe impact it is currently causing to the South Harrison School District. The education of this current generation of children in the South Harrison School district is suffering! Providing children with quality education is a critical component to lifelong success! Shouldn't all children be granted this right no matter where they may reside?

I truly hope that we can have dialogue about the issues surrounding the school funding of the South Harrison School District. Perhaps your insight can help me understand why the educational experience of my children continues to be negatively impacted as a result of regulations the state of New Jersey has put in place. Perhaps together we can look for alternative solutions, so that all children are given the opportunity to have a quality education, one in which they all deserve!

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter and look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,