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**Dr. Kwame R. Morton – NJDOE SFRA Outreach Testimony**  
**January 16, 2025**

Good evening, members of the New Jersey Department of Education. My name is Dr. Kwame R. Morton, Sr. and I am the Superintendent of Cherry Hill Public Schools. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my district and the Cherry Hill Public Schools community.

First, I extend my deepest gratitude to the legislators who provided Stabilized School Budget Aid last year. This critical support covered 45% of the \$6.9 million reduction in state aid that the district incurred. These efforts made a meaningful difference, helping us soften the immediate impact of these cuts on our students and staff. The commitment to supporting districts like Cherry Hill Public Schools is truly appreciated.

Despite this assistance, our district still experienced a real loss in State Aid of approximately \$3.5 million. Beyond the tangible cuts we were forced to make, the most challenging aspect was the unpredictable nature of last year's state aid allocations. Initially, we faced a \$6.9 million loss, following a \$7 million increase the previous year, resulting in a year-over-year range of nearly \$14 million. Such swings create substantial financial instability, making it nearly impossible to plan a budget effectively and efficiently. For Cherry Hill Public Schools, which serves approximately 11,000 students speaking 72 languages, these drastic fluctuations severely impact our ability to retain talented educators, and provide the consistent, high-quality education our students deserve.

I urge state leadership to take critical steps to address this issue. First, we need clear, predictable parameters to prevent dramatic funding reductions from year to year. As a historically underfunded district, I contend that Cherry Hill Public Schools should receive an increase in State Aid this year. However, if there are losses, then there must be a cap on the amount a district might lose annually. Such a cap would allow districts to plan effectively and avoid devastating cuts to staffing, programming, and student supports. Second, a reassessment of the current funding formula is necessary. Metrics like district income and property values do not fully capture the realities of our community, which is experiencing increased demand for English Language Learner support and special education services, as well as growth in students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.



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Cherry Hill taxpayers have demonstrated remarkable dedication to our district, most notably through their approval of a \$363 million bond referendum for facility improvements. This step was essential due to years of underfunding in State Aid, which left the district unable to adequately maintain and improve its facilities. Despite the personal financial sacrifice required, our community prioritized the future of our schools. Now, it is imperative that the state matches this commitment by establishing a fair and consistent funding model. Such a model will support districts like ours as we continue to pursue equity and excellence for all students.

In closing, I want to again express my thanks for the Stabilized School Budget Grant provided last year. I urge everyone here to continue working toward solutions that ensure all schools in New Jersey can offer the stability and opportunity our students need to achieve. By investing in consistency and fairness, we can uphold our promise to cultivate the potential of every child.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.