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**Mrs. Gina Winters – NJDOE SFRA Outreach Testimony
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Good Evening. My name is Gina Winters, and I am the President of the Cherry Hill Board of Education. Thank you for inviting us here tonight to provide feedback on the school funding formula.

Our district shares many of the same educational priorities that Governor Murphy has emphasized during his administration. We were initially delighted to hear in his budget address last year that he was committed to fully funding SFRA. We quickly realized, however, that fully funded does not mean adequately funded to support the needs of our students and schools. Just days after that budget address, we were shocked to learn that our State aid was being cut by almost \$7 million. The unpredictability of the current funding formula from year to year limits our ability to meaningfully engage in long-term planning to meet the growing needs of our students and staff. In order to address this issue, as well as maintain a consistent level of support for our shared priorities, we suggest the following changes.

First, the funding formula should be calibrated so that districts have a degree of year over year predictability in the amount of State aid we will receive. Cherry Hill experienced a \$7 million increase in aid in 2023, followed by a decrease of \$7 million in 2024, resulting in a \$14 million swing. Changes like this make it impossible to plan for the future and destabilize the district budgeting process. **We suggest looking at the factors that go into calculating equalization aid to make sure they still meet the function that was intended when SFRA was enacted in 2008, especially the use of aggregate income in calculating local fair share and its impact on the fluctuations we see.**

Second, transportation aid should be responsive to rising costs and reflect the actual number of students being transported. Despite the fact that our transportation costs have increased from \$12.2 million in 2019 to \$16.8 million in 2024, our transportation aid has consistently remained flat at \$2.8 million. As a result, transportation aid now only accounts for 17% of our actual expenditures for transportation. Rising costs are a result of two factors: the price of bus contracts increasing due to annual inflation and additional students being transported. According to a demographic study commissioned by our Board, our student population will significantly increase over the next five years, especially for our preschool and elementary populations. **We suggest that transportation aid increase with the number of students being transported and reflect rising annual costs to support our growing Pre-K-12 population.**

Third, Cherry Hill has a large special education population, with 23% of our students receiving special education services. The current funding formula uses an average number for allocating special education aid rather than the actual number of students that the district is serving. To better support this population, **we suggest that the actual number of special education students be used when determining special education aid.**



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These changes to the formula will provide greater predictability and reflect actual district needs with respect to transportation and special education to create a better foundation for budgetary planning and meet the needs of our community. On behalf of our almost 11,000 students as well as our staff, thank you for inviting us to provide testimony. We look forward to continuing to work with you on improving the school funding formula to support our students and provide the high quality education they deserve.