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**Assembly Budget Committee Written Testimony  
Mrs. Gina Winters, President, Board of Education | March 25, 2025**

Good morning, Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and honorable members of the Assembly Budget Committee. My name is Gina Winters, and I am here today as President of the Cherry Hill Board of Education, representing our district and most especially the almost 11,000 students we serve each day.

Our district prides itself on the excellent education we provide to our students, but that education is being threatened by continued losses under the current State funding formula. Last year, after receiving devastating cuts, we came before this committee to ask for your help in stabilizing State aid. You responded with a supplemental appropriation of \$3.1 million, for which we remain grateful. That appropriation was not maintained, however, so while the administration promised to limit State aid reductions to 3% this year, Cherry Hill will actually lose nearly \$4 million total for 2025-26. Even worse, if not for that 3% cap on losses, DOE data shows that we would have lost more than \$11 million.

What does that mean for our community? The loss of State aid, coupled with the reality of rising costs, forced our board to approve an initial budget last week that cut spending by more than \$7 million and still required a proposed tax increase beyond the 2% cap in order to balance it.

This cannot be what the Legislature intended when it adopted SFRA 16 years ago.

The administration speaks of our “local fair share” to justify the complete elimination of our equalization aid this year - it is now zero - based on the false premise that our community can afford to pay more. I am here to tell you that Cherry Hill already pays its fair share, and then some. After over 20 years of chronic underfunding, Cherry Hill passed the largest bond referendum in State history in 2022 - over \$363 million - to provide critical repairs to our infrastructure. That’s an increase in local property taxes above and beyond the annual increase we ask of them just to keep up with ever-rising costs.

We are told we need to cut more and be more efficient. We are doing that. But when personnel costs account for almost 3/4 of your budget, think about what that really means. Our teachers are our most valuable resource, especially as we continue to grapple with the lasting effects of the pandemic on our students. I ran for the Board of Education to improve student outcomes and make sure every child has the opportunity to succeed. How are we supposed to do that, when we find ourselves with no choice but to lose the caring adults dedicated to helping our children learn?

What I see before me is a crisis with no end in sight. Year after year, we are forced to raise taxes on a community that is at its breaking point. The formula relies on multipliers that vary annually with absolutely no explanation and uses a measure of wealth based on property values that have no connection to people’s actual ability to pay. Meanwhile, our number of students in need of services and the cost of those services continues to rise.

When SFRA was enacted in 2008, I was here in Trenton as legislative staff. I remember the commitment to a school funding formula that would provide State aid for every school district based on the characteristics of the student population and up-to-date measures of the individual district’s ability to pay. I am here to tell you that in 2025, SFRA no longer meets those goals. Please help us to provide the thorough and efficient - and excellent - education each student deserves.