

March 26th, 2019

Anthony M. Joseph
Browns Mills, NJ 08015

The New Jersey State Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
The New Jersey State House
125 W State Street
Trenton, NJ 08608

Re: Appeal to the Reform to the S2 Formula

To Chairman Sarlo, Vice Chair Cunningham, my Senator from district eight. Sen. Addiego, and esteemed senators of the Budget and Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for hearing my written statement today. My name is Anthony Joseph and I am a rising junior at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, pursuing a double major in Government and Global Studies with a concentration in Latin American Studies. I was born in Browns Mills, New Jersey and am an alumnus from Pemberton Township High School, graduating in 2017. I write this in response to the S2 law, which reformed the state assistance formula for school districts and deprived my district of over twenty-five million dollars over the course of the next several years. It agonizes me that I cannot be in front of you today to voice my objections to this reform and defend my community. I struggled to write this statement, for I feared that it would not emote the love and compassion that I have for my school district. Nevertheless, I hope my words resonate with you today and help convince you to reconsider this path. The future of my hometown is at risk.

The students of Pemberton Township, repeatedly, have encountered incredible odds. Due to our lack of resources, dilapidated school buildings, and understaffed classrooms, we are at a distinct disadvantage to some of our neighboring school districts, like Moorestown, Northern Burlington, and Mt. Laurel. Majority of the families in the district are middle class and we have a significant amount of citizens that are working poor and on welfare.

Many statistics and expert opinions suggest that students who go to school districts with these disadvantages often do not go to college and, if they do, their chances of going to an institution of high caliber is very low. Despite these disadvantages, our students still manage rise and defy those statistics. Michael Thompson, class of 2014, recently graduated New York University and works for the NBA. Destiny Eden—2016 graduate—is pursuing her degree for psychology at Saint John’s University and has gone to several conferences to showcase her research. She has made the Dean’s List every semester. Jessica Lecorchick, who graduated last year, goes to Cornell University, where she pursues a degree in biology and is a research assistant for Odyssey DNA Lab.

They did not have the resources of the students that live in Princeton or Medford. They used books that were older than they are and wrote on chalkboards. They learned in spaces that were falling into disrepair and by faculty who were over encumbered. With the odds against them, they overcame, excelled, and propagated a legacy of resilience, trailblazing, and success.

Their success would not have been possible if it were not for the amazing faculty and staff in Pemberton Township. Our school district truly is a supportive community that provides nothing but the best it can for its students with the limited resources it possesses. Teachers and aids are willing to go above and beyond their responsibilities to give a student the chance they deserve. They sacrifice time with their families, their breaks, and even some of their paycheck to provide what the students need to excel. Sure, this is not a narrative unique to Pemberton Township, but it is even more crucial to note considering that every department in the respective

schools of the district will be cut by 4% because of this law. What is most concerning is the construction of our new elementary facility. How will we be able to not only finish its construction, but also adequately staff the new building?

As I write this letter to you, I am extremely conscious of how fortunate I am. Because of the teachers, administrators, and staff who supported me during my years in Pemberton, I was able to overcome the barriers in front of me and attain heights that I never dreamed of. And, as I sit at my desk, at a college with a rich pedigree of alumni, whose legacy is older than this country, I am acutely aware of my own legacy: of resilience, trailblazing, success—otherwise known as Pemberton Pride. It is a legacy that I hope to extend with my own achievements and preserve for future generations. I hope that they can have better resources than we did and offered a greater array of classes. I hope they will not have to sit at desks that are falling apart and reading books that are older than they are. I hope they will not have to struggle as I did, Michael did, Destiny did, and Jessica did.

Help me achieve those dreams. Reconsider your actions. Let us work together to secure the future of children who are less fortunate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony M. Joseph', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony M. Joseph

