



PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

TONY TRONGONE
Superintendent

DAN SMITH
School Business Administrator

Good morning members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Tony Trongone and I am the superintendent of Pemberton Township Schools in Burlington County. Our township is located on the northwest side of the Pinelands National Reserve, adjacent to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. Serving almost 1,200 military-connected students in Pemberton, I am also proud to serve as New Jersey's Commissioner for Military Connected Students.

Pemberton is a former Abbott district, and in the years since SFRA went into effect, very little in regards to development has changed in the Township of Pemberton. We are still charged with the responsibility of educating nearly 5,000 students coming from poverty-level, low-income, and military families. 55% of our student population is defined as "at-risk," well exceeding the definition of a high poverty and high need school district. We are required by statute as per 6A:13 (Attachment A) to adhere to the regulations regarding programs and services for students in high poverty and high need school districts; such as class size and support. We currently provide a stable and consistent learning environment for:

- Well over 100 homeless students,
- 126 students who were present during a *reported* domestic violence incident,
- 1,177 military connected children; and
- 68 students who were removed from their home via DCP&P

The supports we provide for these students are extensive and multi-faceted, and involve our instructional and support staff, transportation and special services.

We believe changes to SFRA due to S2 has not taken into account a number of factors pertaining to the constitutionality of the funding formula as it applies to our school district:

- Our current weighted enrollment has experienced a 2% drop from 2008, far below the threshold of 5% that prompts a reduction in state aid as per 8A:7F-58 (Attachment B),
- In recent years, we have vigorously looked for economic efficiencies and our amount over adequacy has been reduced significantly. Pemberton requires relief on the reduction of adjustment aid based on the amount over adequacy not on state aid differential. The Abbott 20 decision clearly states that as a former Abbott, we should never be subject to funding below Adequacy, why would you place a phase in model that would take our reductions below adequacy?
- Our municipal tax rate was at 99.4% of the statewide tax rate average last year. Pemberton's proposed tax increase for the 19-20 school year should push us over the 100% state tax rate average; deeming us municipal overburden.

We will continue to close the gap in our local fair share, but we must do so fairly and in increments reasonable to our low-income and poverty-level constituency.



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In closing, we realize there are districts that have been underfunded for years and applaud the Senate's efforts in designing a plan to fund those school districts appropriately. However, we respectfully request a change in the 6-year phase in reduction model away from state aid differential to the amount over adequacy. Meeting the needs of high poverty, high need students, as well as the many military students we serve, depends on this action.

Thank you for your attention and time.