

**Copy of Testimony Provided by Dr. Kenneth R. Hamilton, Supt of  
Schools Monroe Township Public Schools- June 13, 2013**

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee... Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the students and citizens of Monroe Township Public Schools. I'd like to extend a special thank you to Senator Greenstein for constantly giving us audience in our efforts to seek remedy for what we believe to be a gross injustice to our community. Today you will hear from a few residents who have helped to champion this issue. Our goal today is not to bombard you with testimony after testimony rehashing the same data over and over again but to bring to your awareness what we believe to be an unintentional casualty of the school funding formula and the distribution of state aid.

First I'd like to give you a little history about myself. Not that it is germane to the conversation but because it serves as a backdrop to a landscape that has led us here today. My name is Kenneth Hamilton. I have been the Supt in Monroe for 4 1/2 years. Prior to that I was the

Superintendent of Schools in Westampton Township, in Burlington County.

Prior to that I was Assistant Superintendent in Cherry Hill in Camden County. I served as Vice Principal and Principal in Plainfield, NJ and a teacher for special needs in Newark, NJ. I share this because I have had a very nice career in education and I have prided myself on choosing my causes and battles with tremendous discretion.

I have never aspired to be a politician because I find that in times like these it is a distraction from the work that gets to the heart of educating children. However, I am before you today because the politics of funding public education has resulted in an enormous burden to our tax payers. In fact, it has created an atmosphere that pits certain members of our town against one another.

Monroe has experienced enormous growth in the last 10 years and by all indications is likely to see another spike in enrollment in the

next few years which by the way exceeds our current capacity. We have grown from a small, homogeneous, rural community to this incredibly diverse and comprehensive school district with little means to manage this rapid and extraordinary change.

I have never met a parent or community member who has said they wanted to compromise the quality of education that our children receive. They want Monroe to be competitive. People move to Monroe because of our schools. Yet, our taxpayers are telling us, something has got to give. As school leaders our marching orders are quite contradictory. We must prepare for this competitive and rapidly changing environment which means offering more high level courses, engaging our teachers in ongoing, personalized professional development which keeps them ahead of the curve, ensure that we are providing much needed interventions for our early learners and address aging facility needs. We must do so within the confines of a budget

that is supported almost entirely by the local tax levy. This is not fair to our students or our residents.

I am not here to criticize our government or lawmakers. However, we must be cognizant of the fact that we can't create these formulas that look at property value and distribution of wealth without clearly knowing and understanding the intricacies of the communities that are most adversely affected by the enactment of these laws.

It is unfathomable that communities like ours, similar in size, wealth and population receives 4-10 times more state aid than Monroe. To add insult to injury, when our aid was reduced, these same neighboring districts saw an increase in state aid. I am tasked with trying to explain the unexplainable to our tax payers who want to support our schools but not at the expense of losing their homes. I have no doubt that when you plug in certain data points and it calculates state aid it probably computes exactly what it's supposed to compute. But what gets overlooked are the unique features of our community like the number of age restricted homes whose wealth get

calculated without understanding that these homes do not send children to our school which creates a deceptive distribution of wealth. This formula doesn't take into consideration that 16% of our children are eligible for some kind of specialized service or that our transportation costs are extraordinary because so much of our town is without sidewalks that we can't in good conscience require children to walk to school even though they live within walking distance.

I know of no other school district that has gone to such lengths to advocate for its citizens and students because of a fundamental application of a formula that fails to recognize significant district uniqueness. While I represent the 6100 students from Monroe, I also know that this issue is not just about Monroe but about the state's responsibility to ensure a free and appropriate education for all its children in this great State of New Jersey.

I understand that we must do more with less and we have certainly done so by absorbing 150-200 new students each year and creating the lowest tax impact in 15 years. We have tried to play by the rules but it's hard to so do when we are repeatedly penalized and asked to manage unfunded mandates and watch our neighbors get more and more while we get less and less. I urge you to support S 2307 because it is a remedy to a problem that the current formula fails to address.