

ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
State House Annex
Trenton, NJ
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Testimony by Joseph Scarpa
Borough Administrator, Emerson
Mayor, Rochelle Park

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee members. I appreciate this opportunity to address your committee. If I don't get your sympathy as a small town official, then maybe I can get it as a former Legislative Aide, having worked here a number of years ago.

I know from looking at your lengthy agenda that Mayor Anzaldi of Clifton spoke earlier in the day, but he, of course, is a Mayor of a large city. I am here to speak on behalf of the small towns of NJ with populations of less than 10,000.

I would like to register my opposition to Governor Corzine's proposed aid cuts to small towns that essentially are a tax increase on local property owners.

As Mayor and Administrator, I have taken part in formulating close to 30 municipal budgets, including several with zero tax increases. I can clearly state that the Governor's proposed budget is simply an unfair attack on small towns across this state. He is cutting monies to us that are being collected and specifically earmarked for property tax relief, and solely targeting towns based on their population.

The Governor's budget proposal is unfair because it is based on a faulty premise – that smaller towns are inefficient. The facts show that the opposite is true. Smaller towns are less corrupt, more responsive and more efficient than their larger counterparts.

According to the League of Municipalities, the 15 towns in NJ with the lowest per capita spending have populations under 10,000, and 72 of the lowest 100 have populations under 10,000 – all this while getting less state aid than the larger cities.

Rochelle Park, where I am Mayor, is a township with about 5,600 people. It has the fourth lowest average property tax bills of all the 70 towns in Bergen County. Emerson, where I am Administrator, is a borough with about 7,400 people. It spends about \$1,300 per person, compared to the City of Hackensack (the largest municipality in Bergen) that spends \$1,800 per person. How would becoming larger or merging with a city like Hackensack help either one of these small towns?

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In Rochelle Park, we have consolidated services long before Governor Corzine thought of the idea – sharing our DPW Superintendent, recycling and garbage collection, 9-1-1 service, liability insurance coverage, and traffic light repairs with other towns – only to get a \$359,000 aid cut from the Governor.

I might also note that, in Emerson, we just did exactly what the state wanted us to do – introducing our 2008 budget under CAP and with a zero tax increase -- only to find Governor Corzine cutting our tax relief aid by \$215,000 at the last minute.

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, I am not here, like some of the other groups today, asking for an increase in state funding – just a restoration of what small towns have rightfully gotten in the past and for you to realize that small towns have been buckling our fiscal belts all along.

Thank you for your time.