



# KINGSWAY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

*Committed to Excellence*

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High School Principal*

**Public Hearing before NJ Senate Select Committee on School  
Funding**

**January 27, 2017**

**Testimony delivered by Craig Stephenson**

I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak about this important issue that is dramatically impacting children, families, and taxpayers within our communities. My name is Craig Stephenson, and I am a resident of East Greenwich Twp. as well as the principal of Kingsway Regional High School.

Many within our communities and schools have worked for a decade to draw attention to this critical issue; we are cautiously optimistic that we are now on the pathway to finally addressing inequities in school funding.

I wish to focus my testimony today on the impact of unfair funding practices from the perspective of an East Greenwich resident, but I confess that the insight I have as principal of this high school assists me in appreciating how dire this situation is for both our current and future students. We certainly need action now.

My wife and I both worked as teachers at Kingsway Regional High School for 8 years before moving into East Greenwich. Like many of our friends and fellow East Greenwich residents, we moved here because it is a great community with excellent schools.

The schools have been and continue to live up to our expectations, but my position as principal here offers me a unique insight. I can see the precipice at which we are now standing, and I know that if grossly inequitable funding practices are not addressed now, our children will suffer. Given our appreciation of the current and future impact of decade-long unfair funding practices, my wife and I, both employees of Kingsway – a wonderful school – with two children currently at the Samuel Mickle School – another wonderful school - have actually had recent discussions about whether or not we made the right choice moving into this community – a community we and our children love.

We moved into East Greenwich in 2009. Like so many of my fellow East Greenwich residents, our property taxes have increased at a seemingly exponential rate since that time. I understand why this is the case. As state aid is distributed, the two most underfunded school districts in Gloucester County are Kingsway Regional and East Greenwich Twp. Kingsway receives 46% of the state aid it should receive while East Greenwich receives 49%. If Kingsway were funded at 100% of the state's funding formula, the district would receive an additional \$11.6 million dollars in state aid in 2017 alone. I believe East Greenwich School District is underfunded in the neighborhood of \$3.5 million dollars.

*Home of the Dragons*

On behalf of taxpayers, we are angry, because years of inequitable funding practices by the state has placed an inordinate burden for funding our school districts on us, the local taxpayers. State funding that should be provided to Kingsway, East Greenwich, and other underfunded districts throughout the state has instead been sent to a number of school districts who actually receive more than what the established funding formula indicates they should receive.

I know my wife and I are not alone in our frustration. Conversations with friends and with parents of children in the East Greenwich schools and/or Kingsway reveal that many are having the same discussions. A Kingsway parent recently told me that her family is moving simply because they can no longer afford to live here.

As strictly a parent with children in our school districts, I am even more angered and frustrated. While I don't possess the insider knowledge of East Greenwich Schools, I can say that my children continue to have a very positive experience and it certainly seems from a parent perspective that they are providing a high quality education and are doing so in a fiscally responsible manner. I can tell you that at Kingsway we have worked very hard to stretch every dollar and have implemented a number of shared services agreements as part of this effort. I am proud of the product we deliver, and the fiscally responsible manner in which we do so. Kingsway is a great place. I believe our kids have an excellent experience here. However, we at Kingsway have officially reached the tipping point. We can no longer support the demands of a growing district and as we attempt to address a significant budget deficit, we are facing layoffs and program cuts in an already lean district that is likely to see a 5% increase in enrollment next year. This will have a significant impact on our students, and will reduce the programs they will have access to. As a parent, the thought that our own kids will be at a disadvantage because they do not have access to the same opportunities that many other students have throughout the state is infuriating.

I am encouraged that the Senate Select Committee is holding this hearing at Kingsway. Inequitable funding can no longer be ignored by our state. Your presence here is an indication that we are not being ignored, but your presence alone is not enough.

On behalf of my fellow East Greenwich residents and parents, we need action and we need it now. Our children deserve the same opportunities that other children throughout the state are afforded. Unless action is taken to ensure our schools are funded equitably, our students will be at an extreme disadvantage, and I believe I speak for all of the parents of East Greenwich and all of the Kingsway sending districts when I say that this is simply unacceptable.

Again, thank you for this opportunity, thank you for your attention to this matter, and as our elected officials, we trust that you will not rest until this gross inequity is rectified.

