Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today.

I am Sara Joslin, a lifetime member of Girl Scout USA from Cherry Hill serving in the Camden City service unit, Girl Scouts of Central and Southern New Jersey. I served for 6 years as the Environmental Action Chair of Church Women United in New Jersey, participating on the Camden Collaborative Initiative with a focus on environmental education, advocating for Sustainable NJ for Schools in Camden, and for educating pre-K to 12 and the local community about the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am a United Methodist Woman, a faith-based community of women celebrating 150 years in 2019 of mission outreach with women, children and youth. Last summer I volunteered to help facilitate a weekly hands-on science, history and geography-based summer literacy program on sailing the Caribbean with 9 and 10-year-olds at the Camden Neighborhood Center. I now serve as the Vice President of Church Women United in NJ. Church Women United has Human Rights as its first priority, with a focus during 2016-2020 on the right for every child to a quality equitable education.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals from 2016 to 2030 were adopted by the United Nations to address global issues of poverty, hunger, health & well-being, education, economic development, etc as we move forward in addressing global issues such as climate change by building sustainable social and economic life, work and communities which are safe and inclusive of all persons. Goal 10 is to reduce inequalities including in wealth and in power.

Last night I attended the Camden City School District Advisory Board meeting. The room was filled with students, families, teachers and community advocates who attended to speak against the proposed closure of Veterans Memorial Family School (displacing ~550 students) and the proposed displacement of an additional ~350 K-8 students from the Riletta L. Cream Family School in Centerville. Veterans Memorial is the only remaining traditional public school in this immediate neighborhood. The CSSD had previously closed the Washington school in 2012. It is now the site of the school district office.

Community advocates interviewed several students and community members while the CCSD Advisory Board was adjourned for their closed session. It was heart breaking to hear one 8th grader speak about the importance of the supportive Veterans Memorial Family school environment when she was displaced due to the closure of her school and concerned that her younger sister will be displaced to a school outside of their neighborhood. When the Board returned, the public asked for the student who was already speaking to be allowed to complete her comments. The Advisory Board made a motion to adjourn so there was no opportunity for official public comment, despite all 30 available slots for public comment being pre-registered.

I have witnessed the disruption of school communities so that desired school properties could be acquired and converted to Renaissance schools in Camden. The Charles Sumner Family School Girl Scout Troop 30209 was active for ~35 years, the longest continuously active Girl Scout troop in Camden, serving girls at Daisy, Brownie, Junior and Cadette levels. Sumner Family School (K-8) was
shut down at the end of the 2016-2017 school year and is scheduled to reopen as a Kipp Renaissance school serving kindergarten and first grade in 2019-2020. The Sumner school building is uniquely located across from the Isabel Miller Community center and park.

The Camden City School district proposes to displace ~350 students from the Riletta L Cream School in order to convert it from a K-8 family school to an early childhood learning center. This neighborhood school community has been striving and resilient. Through its social networks, relationships and efforts of its teachers and parents, students showed improvement last year despite being displaced into temporary facilities in North Camden for half of the school year when their school building was flooded due to frozen pipes (a design problem which was finally corrected after several incidents of frozen pipes since the school was built in 1992). This school is uniquely located several blocks from one of the two Camden County libraries in Camden City. (The other County library is located on the Rutgers-Camden campus. Camden City closed its remaining city libraries at the end of 2010 due to budget constraints.) Students have taken walking tours to the library since they, like other district schools, have no librarian in their school due to district budget constraints. Redevelopment of the Branch Village housing project (176 new townhouses and 50 new homes) several blocks away is anticipated swell the Centerville student population as new housing is opened.

I urge the NJ State Board of Education & the Commissioner to closely examine the impact of Renaissance and charter schools on budgetary constraints for NJ public school districts. Current diversion of public funds with minimal oversight and ultimately for private gain is unconscionable.

Every student should have the right to a quality equitable education in a safe, supportive environment. Last year the Camden City School District budget was adopted and approved without any contingency funds. We all know this was not realistic. The district focus on improving fiscal responsibility has required additional specialized personnel with financial skills and has identified previously unpaid bills. Camden has requested additional funding to close its $27 million budget gap and funds to properly repair existing neighborhood schools such as Veterans Memorial. The district budget problem is not going to be resolved by forcing students to attend Renaissance schools (thereby transferring the funds with these students) or by bussing students to more distant traditional public schools outside of their neighborhoods. The Camden community has fought for the the right to have a voice and to elect their school board. Numerous applications have been received to fill the vacant slots of the Advisory Board. Camden is a community which actively supports its students, staff, and public schools and seeks to regain local control.

SDG #4 Education is a stand alone goal among the Sustainable Development Goals: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education is a public, private and personal investment in our children and youth as well as in society as a whole. It is a fundamental link to building inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies. It prepares people to be active citizens in a diverse society, to be productive workers and employers, and to address complex issues such as climate change.

I strongly urge that the Sustainable Development Goals be infused within the NJ Student Learning Standards (Pre-K to 12). The Social Studies Standard should be updated to identify the Sustainable Development Goals rather than the Millenium Development Goals. In addition, I advocate that the social studies standard include the responsibility of all persons to be counted in the US Census as well as the importance of Census data for diverse decisioning purposes, including representation in Congress, establishing Federal funding including for schools, housing, healthcare, infrastructure etc, and public/ business decisions on growth, investment, and redevelopment.