Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee. For the record my name is Rick Pressler, Interim President & CEO of the NJ Charter Schools Association (NJCSA). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the 87 public charter schools in New Jersey, the 40,000 students attending those schools this year and the 20,000 households that are currently sitting on waiting lists for public charter schools.

For the record, the NJCSA fully supports S-1987 and commends Senators Sarlo and Ruiz for their leadership on this issue. One of the fundamental philosophies behind public charter schools is providing public schools with the necessary autonomy to provide a quality education, coupled with the commensurate level of accountability. As it relates to salary caps, employment contracts and setting compensation levels for superintendents and/or school leaders, the NJCSA fully supports more autonomy at the local level.

We believe the best decisions about compensation should be made by the elected officials of that local community. Local school boards, and in the case of public charter schools, Boards of Trustees, should possess the autonomy to control and manage their operations and finances, as they see fit, AND within their budgets. That autonomy should include the ability to hire a superintendent, determine an appropriate salary, offer and negotiate a contract, and - from an accountability perspective - annually review the performance and outcomes produced by that superintendent.

As you are all well aware, in 2011 then-Commissioner Bret Schundler imposed superintendent salary caps based on district size. The regulations “sunset” or expire in 2016 and this Administration has given no indication that it intends to lift the cap anytime soon. The fact is, public schools – traditional public schools and public charter schools - already face separate caps on overall administrative spending and on their property tax levies.

Since 2011, we have all witnessed the adverse impacts of the superintendent salary caps – limited talent pools, high turnover rates, quality superintendents leaving the state, and a large number of districts with “temporary” superintendents. Stated simply, the NJCSA does not believe the 2011 superintendent salary caps have proven to be in the best interest of what matters most in this conversation - our children. Therefore, the NJCSA fully supports S1987, fully supports granting more autonomy to public schools, commends the sponsors for their leadership and urges members of this committee to vote in the affirmative.

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