

Dr. Will Hardin, Superintendent  
Camden County Schools, Georgia  
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Good morning Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Will Hardin. I am the Superintendent of Camden County Schools in Kingsland, Georgia. I also serve on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools. I have enjoyed a 30-year career as an educator serving as a teacher, school social worker, principal, district administrator and finally superintendent. I come today to appeal to you to help me ensure my community and others like it can continue the crucial work in schools of developing the lifeblood of a free and democratic society, our children. We need acknowledgement by this committee that Impact Aid funding, through the U.S. Department of Education, lost over \$60 million through the sequester this year. Recognizing this extraordinarily difficult time in our nation's history, Impact Aid funding must be a Congressional priority maintained at the FY 2012 funding levels.

Our district is privileged to serve the service men, women and families of Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. While I will speak specifically today about the importance of Impact Aid to our community, there are countless parents, teachers and school leaders who can provide evidence just as compelling to demonstrate the importance of Impact Aid in their communities. There are 1,400 school districts impacted by a federal presence nationwide serving 11,000,000 students near military installations, federal property or on Indian lands. Despite geographic and cultural differences, one characteristic distinguishes them from their non-federally connected counterparts: They rely on your support more than typical school districts. Our school districts struggle to provide the support children need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and witness

first-hand the economic and human costs to children and communities resulting from inadequate resources.

The Impact Aid program provides justifiable benefits to communities and students. Impact Aid, first signed into law by President Truman in 1950, compensates communities for federal activity that disrupts the traditional financial base for schools. Non-federally impacted schools are typically funded locally by taxes on privately held residential and commercial property. Since federal property and activity conducted on that property are exempt from taxes, a portion of a federally-connected school district's tax digest is forfeited by the local community. While there may be partial compensation for lost taxes to commercial interests due to a "halo effect" (additional economic activity associated with federal activity around the property), the unique tax structure for schools is disrupted while the demand for services - due to an increased enrollment of students - often increases. Businesses and homes located on federal property are exempt from property taxes and purchases made on that property are tax-free. Acknowledging this consequence of a significant federal presence, Congress, through Impact Aid, provides payments to school districts in lieu of lost taxes to assist with the educational needs of all students.

Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base is larger than many municipalities across the nation with a workforce of nearly 9,000 including over 5,000 active duty service men and women. The base sits on 17,000 acres in Camden County and includes 543 homes for military families and 1,490 beds for bachelors. Similarly, the Navy Exchange and commissary have annual sales of \$32 million. All land, improvements, commercial activity and homes are exempt from taxes. As a result of the substantial presence of Kings Bay and other government property in Camden

County, <sup>1</sup>69% of the value of our tax digest is exempt from property taxes that support education. The 12 schools in our district serve 9,100 students; 4,046 of those are federally connected. Local support for all students in our district, whether federally connected or not, is funded by the 31% of our tax digest which is not exempt. In a perfect world, Impact Aid would compensate Camden County an amount equal to 69% of the digest reflecting the non-taxable property it occupies. On average, the Impact Aid payment level, based on a district's calculated maximum payment, has slipped from 62% to 53% in the past decade, partially because appropriations have not kept pace with the increased costs of education. Reductions are inescapable and even logical in times of real crisis such as these, but federally connected school districts – like mine, like Groton Board of Education in Connecticut and Blackfoot School District in Idaho - need you to understand that when the federal government fails to pay their fair share, local taxpayers make up the difference. In return for the freedoms, services, resources and protections I receive as a citizen, I pay my fair share to the federal government despite any personal challenges I may be facing. Why, then, would there be an expectation by the federal government that their obligation to pay their fair share in a community where they enjoy benefits is any less imperative?

Schools in my state and yours experienced unprecedented losses in revenue over the last several years. Camden County saw a 30% decline in state revenue between 2007 and 2012 of \$1,569 per student while expenses for fuel, health care and other inescapable costs continued to rise. When states fail to meet their obligation, federally connected districts are penalized disproportionately to their non-federally connected peers due to their federal impaction. Over the course of the last four years we have eliminated art and music from elementary schools, and

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<sup>1</sup> 2011 Georgia County Guide, Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, UGA, Athens, GA.

decreased Advanced Placement offerings. We eliminated 272 of the 1,486 positions from our schools and increased class sizes by five students in every grade. We reduced our instructional calendar from 180 days to 166 lengthened days, furloughed teachers six days and administrators eight for each of the last three years. Consequently, we watched as lost wages from furloughs and three consecutive years of a reduction in force removed \$5.3 million in annual salary from the local economy. Some of our costs are fixed. We must continue to provide a free, appropriate education for the 12% of our students considered special needs with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), irrespective of budget challenges or inadequate funds.

These budget reductions left their mark. On March 25, 2009 I traveled to each school in our district meeting personally with 28 people, informing them they would not be rehired in the coming year. Unfortunately, that same scenario played out in much the same way in the two succeeding years. I met with school nurses, elementary music teachers, technology instructors and ordinary classroom teachers to try and explain that, though they were faithful to their students, loyal to the community and devoted to their profession, they were losing their jobs.

As leaders, we accept and dutifully fulfill our obligation to make difficult decisions when necessary, the emotional toll of those decisions, however, for those affected by them must never be taken for granted. By saying this I want to remind you that a minus sign on a budget spreadsheet here in Washington often represents a real person or program in our schools. Either of which may mean the difference between a child's success or failure. Your appropriation for Impact Aid is inseparably linked to our budget in federally connected schools and our budgets are connected to people. Mrs. Jennifer Mathis is one of the teachers I met with on March 25, 2009 to tell her I couldn't offer her a job. Although I'm sorry to say I don't know all of the 600 teachers in our schools, I did know Mrs. Mathis. My first meeting with her and her two teenage

sons came a few months earlier when I visited her home following her husband's death as a result of a traffic accident. Were it not for this opportunity to share Mrs. Mathis' story it might be easy to dismiss the number on your spreadsheet that represents Mrs. Mathis and her two boys. By remembering the faces and stories of those affected by my decisions though I galvanize my determination to fulfill my responsibility to the students, teachers and community you and I both serve and ensure my persistence is equal to their sacrifice. I hope you all agree that when we fail to recognize the human cost of our decisions, as leaders, we fail those we serve.

Property owners in Camden County already bear a significant financial obligation to support local schools due to unprecedented state reductions and dismal economic conditions. They amplify the importance of Impact Aid in all federally connected schools. Raising additional taxes on federally connected communities to support schools because states and the federal government fail to recognize their obligation to children is unforgiveable and even unrealistic for many communities with foreclosures and unemployment rates at record highs. Without Impact Aid the negative consequences to federally impacted communities are undeniable. Funding to replace lost revenue from tax exempt property allows schools to fill the gaps and ensure children are insulated to the extent possible from the most economically challenging period any of us can recall in our nation. A time when choosing priorities is more important than ever.

Through Impact Aid, the Federal Government must meet its obligation to citizens in federally connected communities across this country so our schools have adequate resources to support all children, meet the unique needs of military-dependents and fulfill the trust responsibility of a free and appropriate education for Native American students. I respectfully ask members of this subcommittee to lead others in recognizing that federally connected schools deserve the same level of support.

Thank you.