

January 31, 2007

Today I sit here as a witness to testify. I am here as

- a resident of Camden
- a student of the streets
- a student in enrolled in school
- an observer of government **and**
- a staffer of community based organization that serve the people of Camden

The residents of the City of Camden can be placed into two groups. One group *survives* with a hope that government will provide justice, protect freedom, and preserve rights. The other group *realizes* that the same government that persecutes, punishes, and profits from the poor cannot be the group that saves the city.

In Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address given in 1933, he eloquently stated that

“Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in the spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference”.

Today, I ask the legislature to act in charity, not indifference. The residents of Camden have been victims for longer than the 24 years that I have been alive. For too long, Camden has been the most extreme example of a municipal dichotomy as the region's central location. Cooper Hospital will tell you that they are the center health facility for trauma and children. The Tweeter Center is where hundreds of thousands of people from the area come to see concerts. Rutgers University has one of the regions most affordable and excellent law and business schools. These are assets that our city.

Unfortunately, Camden is also the center of some things that we are not proud of. Camden is the region's center for the drug addicted, the drug dealer, the homeless, the prostitutes and their suburban johns. Camden is used as a dumping ground for polluters and a toilet for drunken fleeing concert goers. These issues make Camden's municipal court the busiest in the state. The crime associated makes us an embarrassment to the region.

All of these issues are well publicized and known. There are no secret problems and no secret solutions. As I prepared my statement for today, I tried to think as a realist and a pragmatist. So on this monumental day for the future of my city, I offer suggestions that will have the most likely chance of growing from a seed to a tree that bears healthy fruit. For a few minutes, I ask that you indulge me as I offer some ideas of what the state legislature can do to bring hope to the people those that live in despair:

- There are 28,000 children that live in Camden. We must think of those children and their families first.
 - Currently, the Board of Education is continuously consumed by personnel issues.

- The increase of charter and vocational schools in Camden have left the two regular public high schools as the schools of last resort.
- Surveys, public opinion, and truancy and curfew violation statistics all point to one central theme – the children of Camden have nothing to do after school.
 - There are not enough programs for the 20,000 children that go to school. The legislature should offer grants for CBOs and hold them accountable for the execution of those funds.
- Any additional financial aid that goes to the city has to include grants for starting and growing businesses that want to employ Camden residents.
 - There is no Economic Development plan for the city. There should be an amendment to the legislation that requires one to be written.
- The State should review the city’s management structure and give the COO more influence in making the city government modern with technology and customer (resident) oriented.
 - The state legislature needs to study New Jersey Civil Service and change the rules that keep unqualified or stagnant people in administrative positions.
 - There should also be an amendment that funds the management study mandated by the existing legislation (C.52:27BBB-13), which city officials claim there is no money to implement.
- All mandates that remain in the legislation after review, reauthorization and amendments should be enforced by the COO.
 - The Regional Impact Council should meet (it met only once it four years)
 - The Community Advisory Committee should meet as mandated (the group met twice and it was a show and tell for the mayor and non-profit organizations in the city.)
 - Affirmative Action rules should be followed and contractors should be paid the prevailing wage (C.52:27BBB-57)

I know that I have limited time, so I will conclude my suggestions with that.

Earlier I quoted FDR’s inaugural speech. This is a speech that was given at a time that the economic future of the country was uncertain. FDR followed his eloquent speech with executive prowess that led to prosperity for the nation. His success was inbedded in his own admittance and acceptance that mistakes may be made, but he realized as I am sure this committee does, that it is better to err on the side of aiding the poor, than to make the mistake of ignoring the issues that face them.

Thank you.

Sean M. Brown
 Camden Resident
 smb723@gmail.com
 856-236-2705