

Scot N. McCray, Camden City Resident
437 Chambers Avenue
Legislative Hearing – MRERA Act
Tuesday, January 30, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Scot McCray, and I am a resident of Camden City.

A little over five years ago, nearly three months after I graduated college and returned to New Jersey to begin my first job, I remember reading an article that detailed the state government's intentions to provide economic relief to distressed municipalities. As I completed the article a sense of optimism filled me because my city was to receive a substantial amount of financial assistance aimed at municipal rehabilitation and economic recovery. My initial interpretation of the Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act was that the legislation would focus on physical development in Camden City that would enhance and, or stimulate economic growth, and at the same time the MRERA act would serve as governess over the policy and process that brings any proposed rehabilitation, redevelopment or new development efforts to fruition. At that moment I began to BELIEVE again. I began to believe in my elected public servants, I began to believe that NJ had not forgotten about the poverty stricken cities that lie within its boundaries, and most of all I began to believe that Camden could and would move beyond the nostalgia of what it used to be---an industrial powerhouse, rich in both culture and innovation and beyond the shadows of what it had become---one of the most financially depressed city's in the nation, plagued with violence, political corruption and an overall sense of underachievement. I believed that Camden, along with the vision of this legislation would elevate itself economically and that any potential financial growth would permeate through the fiber of the city's sense of community and spirituality.

So, here we are, four years and three months into the state's \$175 million dollar investment and the one overarching question with at least 175 million answers is: Has there been any progress? If I may, I would like to share my answer and that is an affirmative YES! Over the past four years, the MRERA act has advanced the physical landscape of Camden City. These advancements will provide the city the leveraging

power it needs to attract businesses that will not merely benefit the city's economic status, but will benefit the quality of life for Camden residents in the form of good paying jobs and high quality commerce.

Yet there is still room for improvement. Too often during the past four years the true vision and purpose of the Camden Recovery Act were eclipsed by avoidable pitfalls. In my opinion, the city missed ideal opportunities to secure victories for its residents and the state of NJ because of basic municipal system inadequacies, such as: lack of communication, lack of accountability, insufficient regulation and code enforcement, and ambiguous goals and objectives. However, our leadership (both elected and appointed) has adjusted to the changing political climate and I have a new found confidence in their ability to produce sound policy that will positively utilize the remainder of the MRERA act funding to the complete benefit of Camden residents, organizations and businesses.

The current status of my city reminds me of a passage found in the Bible, in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1, and it reads; "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen". It is the faith that things will continue to get better that keeps me going everyday. I used to hope but now I have faith, faith that our city will look beyond the hope of its potential and realize its power. I have faith that four years into this piece of legislation that Camden is beyond the rhetoric and is prepared to take action.

Earlier in my comments I revealed my initial feelings about the Camden Recovery Act, well I believed in 2003 and I believe today. I believe today because my family believed in Camden almost forty years ago when they relocated from the Eastern Shore of Virginia to Cedar Street in North Camden. I believe in the organizations that still call Camden City home, not because they need us just as much as we need them, but because my grandmother believed when she walked into One Cooper Plaza in 1970 and began a 25 year career at Cooper Hospital and in that same year my mother walked into Bell Telephone (now Verizon) located between Federal and Market Street and began a 31 year

career that kept food on the table, clothes on my back and instilled me with intangible qualities that I can only attribute to a city that valued community, family, and hard work.

You presented Camden the opportunity to regain those intangibles with the Camden Recovery Act, and even though it has not been perfect I implore you to continue your support of our elected officials, our appointed leadership, the dedicated organizations that provide service for us, and most of all the nearly 80,000 residents that make up the “biggest little city” in the United States. I encourage you to have faith in the policy that you have fashioned for our city, and in addition to the bricks and mortar I encourage you to examine the amount of investment dedicated to human capital as a true measure of success.

Ladies and gentleman, amid the hustle and bustle of Camden life, buried under the social ills, but ingrained on every Camden soul is a little determination, and it is that characteristic that is giving life to this policy and it is this characteristic that will make the Camden Recovery Act a success. You just have to believe.