

**TESTIMONY OF
LOUIS S. BEZICH, CHAIRMAN
CAMDEN HIGHER EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE TASK FORCE
TO
SENATE COMMUNITY AND URBAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
AND
ASSEMBLY HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE**

January 30, 2007

Thank you

Good morning Chairman Rice, Chairman Green and members of the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee and the Assembly Housing and Local Government Committee.

My name is Louis Bezich and I am pleased to appear before you today in my role as the Chairman of the Camden Higher Education and Healthcare Taskforce where I represent Camden County College.

The members of the Task Force are CAMCare Health Corporation, Camden County College, Cooper University Hospital, Lourdes Health System, Rowan University, Rutgers-Camden, University of Medicine and Dentistry of NJ, and Virtua Health.

Although our individual presences in the City of Camden go back many decades, the Higher Education Healthcare Task Force, or Eds and Meds, came together in 2001 – and have remained together ever since working collaboratively to help improve the city of Camden, the quality of life of its residents, and support the redevelopment of Camden’s neighborhoods.

Operating on the principle that a stronger Camden means a stronger county, region, and state, the member institutions are playing an important role in the rapidly expanding revitalization efforts in Camden and have played a major role to ensuring the fulfillment of the goals of the Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act.

Each of our institutions has served as a driving force for economic growth and development.

In 2002, the Task Force produced an economic impact study and was followed by a more comprehensive analysis in November 2004, which demonstrated that the member institutions have produced a sizable return on state investments, provided significant quality-of-life improvements to residents, and made multi-million-dollar collective investments of tremendous value to the city and region.

Among the study's most notable findings was that each dollar invested by the state in the Task Force institutions produces a significant return on investment. For example, for every dollar in state financial support received, the institutions generate \$20.60 in total spending and \$8.60 in wages. In addition, 82 cents of each dollar are recaptured by the state in the form of annual tax revenues estimated at \$53.8 million (generated from institutional operations) plus another estimated \$1.8 million (generated from institutional investments).

The effects of these returns cascade throughout the state's economy. For example, a collective \$611 million in overall spending (\$360 million in wages and \$251 million in goods and services purchases) generated nearly \$1.4 billion in total spending throughout the state.

The study also found that the Task Force is the leading employer in Camden, employing (at the time of the study) 7,224 full- and part-time workers or 33 percent of the non-governmental employees working in Camden, including 955 city residents. Further, 55 percent of those employed by the eight institutions are Camden County residents and 91 percent of them are New Jersey residents.

Moreover, the Task Force supports growth of area businesses and community organizations through activities such as spending by students, employees and visitors, financial transactions, facilities use, and charitable donations. Task Force members also

attract new grant funding and renewal investments, the latter of which totaled more than \$27 million in major capital projects in 2001 – the base year of the study.

In addition to the direct economic benefits, the study further highlighted that task force members are responsible for educating more than 8,800 students and awarding more than 1,500 degrees and certificates each year. The institutions also provide quality-of-life services such as pre-college preparation programs, job training, continuing education, professional teacher development, and medical services.

Since the study began, the member institutions have made substantial progress on new capital projects in the city, funded in part from the \$175 million Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act of 2002, which those members here today will be able to share with the committee.

In addition to the economic investment value that the members bring to the City, they also are interested in helping attract investors and developers to create an enhanced tax base.

Toward that end, to identify the potential demand for new housing (rental and sale) in the city, the member institutions conducted a survey of their Camden-based employees and graduate students in March 2006 regarding their interest in new housing near their places of employment or school.

The results of that study were released in December 2006 showing that a potential market exists within their staff, medical professionals, and graduate students for new housing convenient to their place of employment.

I have copies of the study for the members, but let me note that thirty-one percent of the respondents, all of whom currently live in the suburbs, said that they would consider living in Camden if new housing were built.

This is the first such study to our knowledge conducted in the city and it indicates that among city and suburban residents who work in Camden there is an interest in new housing located near their place of employment.

Colleges, universities, and healthcare institutions have long taken the lead in urban redevelopment. National models include the University of Pennsylvania, the Council for Higher Education in Newark (CHEN), Duke University, Marquette University, and Trinity College. All have led successful neighborhood revitalization programs for the betterment of their communities.

We believe that the Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act investment in our member institutions was a sound one – a truly Winning Investment for the City of Camden and New Jersey. Your investment in us has allowed us to extend our services even further into the City and the region.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you and thank you for your support. Our members have served the City for many years and we will do so for many more to come. We are proud to be your partners in helping to revitalize the City.

Thank you.