

**Testimony before the Assembly Housing and Local Government and Senate
Community and Urban Affairs Joint Hearing on The Camden Recovery Act**

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January 30, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is John Sheridan, and I am the Senior Executive Vice President of Cooper University Hospital in Camden.

Cooper University Hospital is an essential provider of critical care services for Camden and the South Jersey region. Cooper is home to South Jersey's only Level I Trauma Center, and serves as the top tertiary care hospital in the region. We are also a safety net hospital, providing nearly \$75 million worth of charity care annually. Each year, nearly half of Camden residents visit a hospital or emergency room; and approximately half of those visits are to Cooper.

Cooper is also the largest non-government employer in the City of Camden. Currently, 543 Camden residents are employed by the Cooper Health System.

I want to begin by expressing our appreciation for the state's investment in the City of Camden. Meaningful projects are underway and even more are planned; but perhaps the greatest return on the state's investment is a sense of hope.

In short, at Cooper, we are excited about the future of Camden, and particularly the future of the Cooper Plaza/Lanning Square neighborhood that has been our home for 120 years.

As you know, Cooper University Hospital was the beneficiary of a \$12.35 million grant as part of the Economic Recovery Act. These funds have helped spur nearly \$600 million of total investment for what we call the "Health Sciences Campus," and its

surrounding environment. This investment is having a transformative effect on the Cooper Plaza/Lanning Square neighborhood.

To date, the progress has been a true example of collaborative, community-based revitalization. I know that Cooper's excitement is shared by the Cooper Lanning Civic Association (and its president, Sheila Roberts), which represents hundreds of long-time residents; and by other institutional anchors that share a long-term commitment to this city, such as Robert Wood Johnson Medical School (RWJMS) and the Coriell Institute.

We are making our full "Vision" DVD available to committee members today, for your review. In the short time I have here today let me give you an overview of the investment and progress:

Hospital expansion and parking facility with retail. Cooper University Hospital is engaged in a \$220 million expansion project that will result in a new 10-story patient pavilion. This will improve the quality of care in many respects, including our emergency room services. Currently, Cooper's ER does 49,000 patient visits per year in a space designed for 20,000. In the new pavilion, we will have an ER double the size of our current one.

During the construction process, we will reorient the hospital's entrance on MLK Boulevard to welcome thousands of patients, visitors, and employees to the Health Sciences Campus taking shape here.

The steel structure will soon rise on our building, with the pavilion opening in 2008.

On adjacent property, the Camden County Improvement Authority has begun construction of a 1,600-car parking facility with 9,600 square feet of ground-level retail space. Not only will this provide much-needed parking; it will be a step toward revitalizing the Broadway corridor, with retail tenants occupying the space in Fall 2007.

Residential. The improved, expanded hospital area will be a catalyst for a virtuous cycle of economic activity and improved safety in the neighborhood. Enhanced security lighting and special services to clean up the sidewalks and streets, combined with the retail space and new foot traffic surrounding the hospital and garage, will create a more vibrant neighborhood and increase the dollars flowing into the city economy.

Neighborhood residents will see transformations in housing as well. We are especially proud of a unique partnership of Cooper University Hospital, HMFA, and the non-profit St. Joseph's Carpenters' Society that is rehabilitating 10 homes (including several historic homes) in our neighborhood. Three homes are completed, and rehabilitation on the remaining seven will commence and complete in 2007.

The homes have been made affordable for middle-class families, with subsidies from Cooper and HMFA; and St. Joseph's is hosting financial classes for prospective owners. I'm happy to note that at least three Cooper employees and their families will occupy some of these homes.

Beyond this particular partnership with Cooper, St. Joseph's is rehabilitating another approximately 30 homes in the Cooper Plaza neighborhood.

Further, the Cooper/Lanning Housing Implementation Task force – with strong membership from residents, the Camden Redevelopment Agency, Cooper, city-designated redevelopers and others – is working on plans for housing development in the neighborhood, with the first phase focusing on “infill” housing. The goals are to provide quality housing for families and make the area safer. This development is in the planning and design phase, with 40 units planned in two stages.

Medical school, cancer building, and Biomedical/Stem Cell facility. The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) is engaged in site acquisition on the west side of Broadway for a new, 165,000 square foot academic research building. This state-of-the-art building will house researchers, faculty, students and support staff, and

provide the neighborhood with much-needed facilities, including a nearly 300-seat auditorium and café. The Camden Economic Recovery Board (ERB) is supplying \$9 million in funding.

Plans for a new Cancer Institute of New Jersey building are in the works. And, the recently-signed stem cell legislation provides \$50 million for a biomedical sciences and stem cell research facility, which is also to be located on the Health Sciences Campus, further boosting the critical mass of investment in the neighborhood.

The first project - the medical school building - will be completed in late 2009 or early 2010. All these investments will enhance the Health Sciences Campus, revitalize the Broadway corridor, bring foot traffic to the neighborhood, provide jobs including those in support services, and introduce more dollars into the neighborhood economy.

Lanning Square elementary school. The neighborhood will be home to a brand-new Lanning Square Elementary School, as the SCC makes funds available. The school is slated to be constructed adjacent to the Health Sciences Campus, thus offering special potential for science opportunities for students.

Parks. At Cooper, we are continuing to work with the Cooper Lanning Civic Association to plan the rehabilitation of the Cooper Commons park. The initial design phase, with input from community members, has resulted in plans that include a safe “tot lot” play area and a small outdoor amphitheatre for community gatherings. Further, the new design promotes public safety, allowing better sight lines into the park and improved police patrol. Also, by prioritizing housing infill surrounding the park, we ensure more eyes on the park, making it safer.

Additional projects include upgrading the 7th Street median with lighting that increases safety and multiple features that honor the historic character of the neighborhood. Another small park will be created from unused land adjacent to Route 676.

After the new parking facility is completed, Cooper will demolish our current parking deck to make way for a welcoming greenspace at the corner of Haddon Ave. and Martin Luther King Blvd. We hope that this will provide a welcoming “gateway” to Camden for those entering the city from 676 and traveling toward downtown and the waterfront. It will complement the work of the City and the Greater Camden Partnership to upgrade MLK Boulevard.

In sum, we are excited about what’s taking shape in the Cooper Plaza/Lanning Square neighborhood. Cooper has taken a different approach from many hospital expansions, seeking to be just a health care leader, but a partner in the revitalization of our home city.

We know that Cooper’s success and Camden’s success are inextricable. We share a common destiny.

Cooper University Hospital is proud to call Camden home, and we are excited to see a bright future become more attainable every day.

Thank you.