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Good morning. Madame Chairwoman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Janellen Duffy, and I serve as the executive director for a non-profit advocacy organization called JerseyCAN: The New Jersey Campaign for Achievement Now. As our name suggests, at JerseyCAN we are focused on closing the achievement gap for *all* students across the state as well as raising the bar to ensure that they are truly prepared for college and their careers.

Governor Kean serves as the board co-chair for JerseyCAN, and notably he also serves on the leadership group for Pre-K Our Way. We also have several current and retired New Jersey business leaders on our board who are highly supportive of expanding high quality early education opportunities.

When we launched JerseyCAN almost three years ago, we did a study to look across the state and identify the most critically needed policy changes to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education and graduate from high school ready to succeed in higher education and the workforce. For this study, we interviewed over 70 education stakeholders across the state, including superintendents, local elected officials, teachers, parents, school leaders and others. From this study, we learned that expanding access to high quality preschool, particularly for low-income students, rises to the top five priorities for education experts across the state.¹

I know that several members of this committee also consider preschool expansion for low-income students a high priority. I recall working with some of you on the School Funding Reform Act when I was in the Corzine Administration and the preschool initiative—included as a part of the SFRA—was clearly a priority for many of you.

You've heard the research today from the experts and business leaders regarding the benefits of preschool and from school district leaders about the immediate impact preschool has had on students in their districts. Our recommendation, like theirs, is to fund the existing preschool initiative embedded in the School Funding Reform Act. As you have heard today, this would entail expanding the high quality Abbott preschool program to three and four-year-olds in about 90 districts and all low-income children in the remaining districts across the state.

New Jersey is already a leader in preschool when we look at efforts across the country. We rank second nationally in spending, investing \$12,157 per-child according to NIEER. In addition, compared to other states, New Jersey has done

¹ "New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence 2014," JerseyCAN, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://jerseycan.org/sites/jerseycan.org/files/JerseyCAN-FrameworkLong-WEB.pdf>.

particularly well in providing access to three-year-olds, serving about 20 percent of kids at age three, which places us fourth nationally.²

We urge the committee and other policymakers to build on this leadership and move forward with funding an expansion of high quality preschool so all low-income students can gain access to these programs, which will have both short and longer-term effects on their academic performance and truly their overall well being.

Thank you for your time today and for allowing us to share our recommendations.

² W. Steven Barnett, Megan Carolan, Jim Squires, Kristy Clarke Brown, & Michelle Horowitz. (2015). "The State of Preschool 2014: State Preschool Yearbook," National Institute for Early Education Research, accessed September 18, 2015, http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Yearbook2014_full2_o.pdf