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NJ Lawmakers Look For Alternatives to Christie's Budget Cuts

by KYW's David Madden

A New Jersey Assembly committee on Wednesday heard from people who will be taking a hit because of the \$2.2 billion in budget cuts being imposed by governor Chris Christie.

Those affected cover a wide spectrum-- from school districts to the handicapped ([see related story](#)).

The session started off with 13-year-old Rocco Fiorentino who, although blind, attends Voorhees Middle School and is an aspiring singer.

Without the aid his family receives from the state, though, he says all that could change for him. And, Fiorentino points out, Christie's plan calls for cutting about a half-million dollars in aid to the visually impaired:

"These budget cuts would directly affect the education of each and every child who deals with a visual challenge. Cutting costs at all costs is not going to solve the long-term budget challenges in this great state."

Jim Devereaux, assistant superintendent for Cherry Hill schools, says his district is being unfairly targeted for almost \$4 million in state aid cuts just because they had held money in reserve:

"Would we have made that same decision again? Obviously not. So what would we have done? I regret to say we would have spent everything we had, as there is no incentive to do otherwise."

Christie's plan slashes state aid to schools by a half billion dollars this year. Committee members expressed interest in one idea the district floated to save money: getting rid of burdensome regulations and many unfunded mandates.

Budget committee members on both sides of the aisle agree that the cuts will hurt. They differ, though, on how to approach Christie's plan. Democrats want a dialogue with the governor, while Republicans are looking for other programs that might be cut instead.