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Business supports budget cuts that draw widespread ire



By Andrew Kitchenman

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The [\\$2.2 billion cut to state spending](#) drew opposition from groups supporting residents with disabilities, school districts and hospitals, but a leading business association has heard positives responses.

A variety of speakers addressed the Assembly Budget Committee Wednesday morning, including **Betsy Ryan**, president of the New Jersey Hospital Association. She noted that hospitals must provide charity care, which is losing \$25 million due to Christie's cuts.

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"We would ask that health care be a priority," Ryan said of budget deliberations.

Speakers were lined up for the committee hearing, starting with **Rocco Fiorentino**, a 13-year-old Voorhees resident who is blind.

Fiorentino said he was protesting the budget cut because it would lead to the loss of vision equipment for blind children, which he said would force them out of public schools and disrupt learning job skills.

He was followed by advocates for those with developmental disabilities and for mental health agencies.

But **Arthur Maurice**, New Jersey Business & Industry Association senior vice president, said outside the meeting that NJBIA members have been expressing support for Christie's cuts. He added that business owners have never believed public officials would cut government spending.

"That's exactly what the governor has done. They're very happy that they're finally seeing fiscal sanity from a governor," Maurice said.

Committee Chairman **Louis D. Greenwald** (D-Voorhees) suggested the state eliminate cuts to school spending for this budget year by spending \$500 million in its projected fund balance.

Greenwald repeatedly quoted Assemblyman **Joseph R. Malone III** (R-Bordentown), the Republican assembly budget officer, who criticized school budget cuts proposed by then-Gov. **Jon S. Corzine** in December. Christie's school cuts are based on how much districts have in reserve, similar to Corzine's proposal.

Assemblyman **Declan O'Scanlon** (R-Red Bank) said he would have preferred targeting cuts, but Christie was faced with a practical question of whether cuts to districts without reserves would have forced school closures.

Christie spokesman **Michael Drewniak** said Christie's administration had to act quickly, since the state is facing a deficit for the fiscal year ending June 30.

"We're operating under a great sense of urgency," Drewniak said.

James Devereaux, business administrator for the Cherry Hill School District, said the state should distribute cuts equitably, rather than concentrating them on districts that have built up reserves to offset property taxes next year.

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