

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**AGREEMENT REACHED TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
FOR SOMALI BANTU STUDENTS IN PITTSBURGH**

The federal Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights accepted an agreement today between the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Education Law Center-PA (ELC) resolving the Complaint the Center filed almost a year ago. The Complaint asserted, among other things, that the District unnecessarily segregated Somali Bantu students and failed to communicate appropriately with students and parents.

The Agreement is intended to improve educational opportunities for the over 100 Somali Bantu students and other English language learners in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Under the Agreement, the District commits, among other things, to do the following:

- (1) Hire a Somali speaking ombudsperson to advocate on behalf of the Somali Bantu students;
- (2) Provide school and educational information in the language and mode the Somali Bantu parents and other English language learners understand;
- (3) Expand professional development efforts with regard to issues specific to refugee students and other English language learners; and
- (4) Address issues of racial and ethnic harassment through staff training, monitoring and data collection.

Ibrahim Muya, a Somali Bantu parent and community leader said, *"This is very good news for the Somali Bantu. With Somali interpreters and greater understanding of our culture, parents and students can now be involved and benefit more from the educational process."* **Khadra Mohammed**, Executive Director, Pittsburgh Refugee Center explained, *"The District's commitment to strengthening its ESL programs and services to parents who do not speak English will benefit all ESL students."* *"The District's commitments are critical first steps,"* said **Nancy A. Hubley**, the attorney who filed the Complaint, *"but there is more work to be done if these students are to be included in the promises of the Superintendent's educational reforms."* **Ralia Debrow**, another parent said she was pleased with the Agreement and hoped the District would continue to do good things for the Somali Bantu children.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a non-profit legal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have access to a quality public education. The Center's work focuses on helping kids and improving schools. To learn more about ELC and its work visit: www.elc-pa.org