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Advocates Encouraged by Governor's New Reform Effort

Joint statement from Juvenile Law Center and Education Law Center

July 31, 2019: Today, Governor Wolf acknowledged the Commonwealth's devastating decades-long failure to keep the young people in its care safe from harm. Juvenile Law Center and Education Law Center are encouraged by the Governor's candid recognition of the breadth of systemic failure and his commitment to prompt, profound, and necessary reform. Juvenile Law Center and Education Law Center have continually called for significant reform and in April of this year, with partner Dechert LLP, filed a class action lawsuit alleging abuse and lack of education on behalf of hundreds of youth who were placed at Glen Mills Schools, a residential facility located in Delaware County, PA.

Juvenile Law Center and Education Law Center are dedicated to supporting the newly created Office of Advocacy and Reform and Council on Reform to ensure meaningful systemic transformation that includes dramatic reductions in the use of institutions—not just tinkering around the edges.

"We have heard repeatedly – including from our youth advocates in Juveniles for Justice and Youth Fostering Change, and from young people at Glen Mills – that young people in institutions across the Commonwealth are not safe or supported, nor do they receive an effective education," said Kate Burdick, senior attorney at Juvenile Law Center. "The key to reform is moving away from a failed youth prison model; Governor Wolf is right to prioritize bold reductions in institutional placements. As the work moves forward, we urge the Governor to ensure that directly impacted youth and families drive the conversation on reform."

"For too long, children and youth in residential placements have been subject to abuse, neglect, and denied a real education," said Maura McInerney, legal director at Education Law Center. "We applaud the Governor's action today and urge the newly formed Council on Reform to address both the safety and the well-being of these children – including their right to a quality education. This will require new policies and practices to dramatically reduce referrals to residential placements, ensure access to public schools, and provide effective state oversight of all schools operated in such settings."

For more information see:

[*Unsafe and Uneducated*](#), Education Law Center and Children's Rights, (December 2018)

[*Broken Bridges*](#), Juvenile Law Center, (2018)

[*Operation: Education*](#), Juvenile Law Center, (2019)

[*Glen Mills press release*](#), Education Law Center, Juvenile Law Center, and Dechert LLP, (2019)

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems.

Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, trainings, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.

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