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Testimony Submitted to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board of Directors

By Essence Kimes, J.D.; Education Law Center (ELC)

The Education Law Center stands with the broad coalition of students, parents, and partners urging you to invest in students and create school climates where every child is supported.

The Education Law Center's mission is to ensure equal access to a high-quality education for all students in Pennsylvania. As an Equal Justice Works Fellow working to improve education outcomes of Black girls through mental health, I strongly encourage the Board to consider the pressing needs of PPS students when deciding how to allocate funds.

We know that the District is facing unprecedented challenges amid COVID-19 and the looming budget crisis. However, students are also facing new and pre-existing learning barriers in remote learning. Now is the time to address students' needs by prioritizing appropriate supports and services.

Here are three recommendations to accomplish this goal:

- (1) Increase the number of counselors, psychologists, and social workers** available to support students' mental health challenges, their ability to work through trauma, and manage family issues. These supports are imperative for Black girls given the continuous barriers they face from systemic racism, sexism, and ableism.

- (2) Devote resources to coordinate the range of student services** that PPS offers (restorative practices, mental health, community schools, etc.). Black girls often come to school with multiple existing and emerging needs yet fail to get help because services are siloed. Students deserve to have their needs responded to holistically, with coordination and care.

(3) Utilize all School Safety Grants for proactive, restorative causes in schools. One of ELC's top priorities is advocating for more education funding from the state. When state grants are available – PPS should utilize those resources to increase mental health supports, rather than funding more security or surveillance.

Thank you for welcoming the Education Law Center as a collaborator in this work. I look forward to continuing to advocate with and for Black girls throughout the course of my fellowship and remain available as a resource.

Who we are: The Education Law Center (ELC) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all Pennsylvania's children, from birth through twenty-one, have access to a quality public education. For 45 years, ELC has provided legal advice, consultation, and technical assistance to thousands of parents, advocates, and other professionals on issues of public education. Our work focuses on ensuring that the students, families, and communities most impacted are centered in the decision-making process and part of co-constructing solutions.