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Testimony Submitted to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board of Directors
Education Law Center (ELC)
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With appreciation for the changes and the progress the District has already made in revising its Student Code of Conduct, we continue our work to prevent police involvement in the lives of students in schools, especially for minor, non-violent offenses, for which white students and students without disabilities are rarely disciplined.

We offer our comments today with a shared commitment to creating equitable and inclusive schools where education and culturally appropriate supports and services replace punitive discipline for all students.

As you continue to amend the Code and consider the pending Addendum, we ask you to keep in the mind District's disproportionate exclusion of Black and brown students and its extremely high rate of referrals of Black girls. Black girls in Allegheny County are referred to the juvenile court at a rate 11 times that of White girls. This data and the experience of students in Pittsburgh Public Schools makes clear that systemic racism and implicit bias push Black girls out of schools and into the criminal justice system.

We offer the following recommendations:

(1) **Remove referral and consultation with school police from Level 3 infractions.** Law enforcement should only be notified when required by law**.** Police presence is not needed in schools. Indeed, many school districts across the county, state and country operate smoothly without the presence of police. Police too often criminalize normal, developmentally appropriate

behavior, particularly for Black and brown students and students with disabilities. Removing police is just one step towards ensuring schools are safe places for learning, free of racism, sexism and ableism.

Our overarching recommendation is to eliminate the PPS police force and to reallocate these funds to hire culturally responsive and appropriate counselors, social workers, and psychologists. We are confident schools can handle these infractions without the presence of police.

(2) The proposal to change the Code to allow for exclusionary discipline for repeated low-level infractions should be rejected. The District should end exclusions for repeated, low level infractions. When behavior persists, adults should revisit the responses and explore alternative ways to support the child in learning new behaviors. School personnel should be trained and supported with a broad range of resources to meet the needs of individual students and to manage behaviors in developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive ways. We encourage you to support strategies that treat all children equitably and foster learning environments that meet childhood mistakes with proven approaches that help kids learn, grow, and thrive.

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.

For years, the Education Law Center has worked collaboratively with community partners, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and its solicitors on revisions to the Code of Student Conduct. This is a valued collaboration for ELC – where we strive to understand and consider the District's complex needs while elevating the voices of students, families, and communities most impacted by school discipline, policing, and pushout.

Thank you for your time and consideration.