

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Education Law Center – PA and Public Interest Law Center statement on the 2023-24 Pennsylvania Budget**

*The firms represent petitioner school districts, parents and organizations in the PA school funding case*

“Pennsylvania’s unconstitutional system of public school funding continues to leave the students who need the most support with the least, because they live in low-wealth communities. The increases in this year’s budget, while appreciated, do not fundamentally change the unconstitutional and unacceptable status quo. In every corner of the state, students in public schools continue to be denied the basic resources they need to succeed academically, civically, and socially.

“[Commonwealth Court’s school funding decision](#) issued in February affirmed the right of every Pennsylvania child in every community to access contemporary and effective public schools. We thank the House of Representatives for recognizing that vouchers, or any other state subsidy for private schools, divert public funding to private schools that can and often do discriminate and are not accountable. Such a sweeping change will not move us one dollar closer to bringing the school funding system into constitutional compliance.

“Our focus now must turn to what the Governor and House leadership alike have promised: using the next six months to devise a comprehensive, constitutionally compliant school funding plan to ensure, once and for all, that all children have access to the contemporary, effective system of public education that the constitution mandates, that our children need, and that the decision of the Commonwealth Court requires.”

### **Background**

- This state budget is the first that has passed since Commonwealth Court declared Pennsylvania’s school funding system unconstitutional on February 7.
- From the court ruling: “Educators credibly testified to lacking the very resources state officials have identified as essential to student achievement, some of which are as basic as safe and temperate facilities in which children can learn. Educators also testified about being forced to choose which few students would benefit from the limited resources they could afford to provide, despite knowing more students needed those same resources.”
- This year’s budget includes \$100 million in renewed support for the Level Up program, which provides additional resources to the most deeply underfunded districts in the commonwealth.
- The proposed voucher program that would have sent public funds to private schools ultimately was not included in this budget. Funding private schools does not address the constitutional mandate that the General Assembly must support and maintain a contemporary, effective public education system that is available to every child in the commonwealth. [See the Law Centers’ joint memo on private schools and the court’s decision.](#)

- The voucher program would have directed public funding to private institutions that can and do refuse to serve students that public schools have a legal responsibility to educate: students who are learning English, students with disabilities, students who struggle academically or behaviorally, LGBTQ+ students, and many more. [See ELC's June statement.](#)
- This year's 7.8 percent increase in basic education funding allows districts to keep pace with inflation. The gap between the support students have in public schools and the support they need is a [statewide shortfall estimated to be at least \\$4.6 billion.](#)
- This year's budget also provides a significantly smaller increase in state support for special education (\$50 million) than last year's budget (\$100 million). It does not include dedicated support for school facilities. These costs continue to rise in districts across the state and are borne by local taxpayers and students.