



**PHILADELPHIA**  
1800 JFK Blvd., Suite 1900A  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
T 215-238-6970  
F 215-772-3125

**PITTSBURGH**  
429 Fourth Ave., Suite 1910  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
T 412-258-2120  
F 412-535-8225

## **Education Law Center – PA**

### **Overview**

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The Education Law Center-PA's (ELC-PA) mission is to ensure access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania. Over the past 50 years, ELC-PA has been a known resource for parents, child-serving professionals, and advocates in Pennsylvania. Our principal strategies include direct representation, impact litigation, policy advocacy, community engagement, and strategic communications.

With offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, we work statewide to provide immediate relief to individual students while also advancing systems-level reforms that benefit thousands of underserved students, guided by our three priority areas:

- 1) ***Ensuring Equal Access to Quality Public Schools:*** ELC-PA addresses real-time educational barriers and systemic concerns impacting the educational experiences of underserved student populations. Our focus is improving education access for children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children experiencing homelessness, multilingual learners, LGBTQ+ youth, and children at the intersection of multiple underserved identities. Our Helpline is the only free legal service solely focused on helping students access a quality public education in Pennsylvania, providing information, advice, referrals, legal consultation, and direct representation. We also produce publications and conduct trainings to help parents, caregivers, and child-serving professionals advocate on behalf of the children in their care.
- 2) ***Advocating for Fair Education Funding:*** ELC-PA works with statewide and local partners to push for the changes needed to address Pennsylvania's school funding crisis. We filed a lawsuit against the Commonwealth over a decade ago for failure to fund public education under the state constitution. We won this case in a decisive 2023 victory in Commonwealth Court, in an order and opinion finding education is a fundamental right and deeming the state's current funding system unconstitutional and discriminatory. Now, we are focused on the remedy. Our litigation is complemented by policy advocacy, including budget advocacy through the PA Schools Work (PASW) coalition, as well as educating policymakers on the state's education funding system, our lawsuit, and the necessary funding increases to ensure the state is adequately and equitably funding public education.
- 3) ***Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline:*** ELC-PA aims to end school pushout by eliminating exclusionary discipline policies that disproportionately harm Black and Brown youth, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ and gender-expansive youth, with a focus on advancing the rights of Black girls. In addition to confronting discriminatory policies, we advocate for schools to adopt research-based interventions that will improve school climates and build inclusive, antiracist, and affirming schools. In the juvenile justice system, we aim to ensure that children can access the full range of public education programs, in part by advocating for the structures necessary to improve oversight of education in residential facilities. We also provide individual representation when students are excluded from the classroom without due process.

**Ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have equal access to a quality public education.**

## OUR IMPACT

We have seen monumental wins for students across Pennsylvania as a result of ELC-PA's 50 years of advocacy. Recent wins include:

- Secured a **second year of historic new investments in Pennsylvania's most underfunded schools**, bringing us closer to an equitable and constitutionally compliant school funding system mandated by the landmark decision in [our Commonwealth Court case](#).
- **Pushed back on federal efforts to undermine public education**, including efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, deprive public schools of essential funding that supports our most underserved students, and drastically reduce federal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. ELC-PA partners with organizations across the country to fight back through advocacy, federal comments, and amicus briefs, while providing critical Pennsylvania-specific context and demonstrating the real impact these federal threats have on local students and schools.
- Educated communities and school officials statewide on **the rights of immigrant students in our public schools** and provided model policies and protocols to ensure continued access to safe learning environments.
- Advocated for the passage of Pennsylvania's CROWN Act, helping secure new statutory protections that **protect public school students against racial hair discrimination** based on hair type, hair texture, or protective hairstyles like braids, twists, knots and locs. Public school students are specifically protected by this law.
- Released a [report](#), along with Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, that analyzed statewide data and identified **education barriers impacting children and youth in foster care** based on ELC-PA's representation. The report relies on statewide data not previously disclosed and breaks new ground by detailing the educational outcomes and glaring inequities for students in care.
- **Assisted children experiencing homelessness, in foster care, and in the juvenile justice system** to receive the education they need and deserve.
- Represented more than 90 families **to secure early intervention services** for their young children with disabilities and advocated for new systemic policies to ensure effective transition from preschool to kindergarten.
- Supported **parent advocacy** in 38 school districts, **countering harmful, extremist school board policies** that exclude transgender students and create hostile school environments for Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ students.
- Remedied special education deficiencies through state complaints that led to new policies expanding access to **education for youth in detention centers** in Philadelphia and Allegheny County.
- Through **ELC-PA's Helpline**, annually support more than 1,000 students and families — primarily those who are most marginalized by our education system at the intersection of race, gender, and disability.

Learn more: [www.elc-pa.org](http://www.elc-pa.org)