

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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School Districts, Parents Take School Funding Challenge to State's Highest Court

Harrisburg, Pa. – Today school districts, parents and two statewide associations filed an appeal in Pennsylvania Supreme Court challenging last month's Commonwealth Court decision, which dismissed a lawsuit contesting the state's failure to adequately and equitably fund Pennsylvania's public schools as required by the Pennsylvania Constitution. The state Supreme Court is obligated to hear the appeal.

“Our Supreme Court bears the responsibility for ensuring that our most precious constitutional rights are protected. We hope that the high court will agree that this responsibility includes public education, the most important issue facing our Commonwealth,” said Jennifer Clarke, executive director of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.

The case, *William Penn School District, et al., v. Department of Education, et al.*, alleges that legislative leaders, state education officials, and the Governor are in violation of their constitutional obligation to provide a system of public education that gives all children in Pennsylvania an opportunity to learn state-defined curriculum, meet state-imposed academic standards, and thrive in today's world. The case was brought last November by seven parents, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS), the NAACP Pennsylvania State Conference, and six districts including the William Penn School District, the Panther Valley School District, the School District of Lancaster, the Greater Johnstown School District, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District and the Shenandoah Valley School District. The Public Interest Law Center and the Education Law Center-PA are representing the districts and parents.

In an April decision, the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania interpreted prior Supreme Court precedent as eliminating any role for the courts in determining whether the legislature complies with the state constitution on school funding questions.

“Today, many students across the state are finishing yet another school year without the basic resources they need to meet rigorous state-imposed standards,” said Maura McInerney of the Education Law Center. “It is time for our courts to recognize the substantial developments that have taken place since previous lawsuits were heard and ensure that the legislature complies with its constitutional duty to provide a thorough and efficient system of public education. Pennsylvania's public school students are entitled to their day in court.”

“Our state constitution enshrines the idea that a right to a high-quality public education transcends politics,” said Michael Churchill, of counsel with the Public Interest Law Center of

Philadelphia. “That right was built into every state constitution in the country and has been found justiciable by courts in 38 states. This is because all Americans recognize that a good public education is the cornerstone for prosperity and progress.”

The Court will issue a briefing schedule and determine when this case will be heard.

The appeal can be viewed here: www.edfundinglawsuit.wordpress.com/legal-proceedings/

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The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to improve the well-being and life prospects of vulnerable populations by ensuring they have access to fundamental resources including a high-quality public education, access to health care, employment, housing, safe and healthy neighborhoods and the right to vote. For more information visit www.pilcop.org or follow on Twitter @PILCOP1969.

The Education Law Center-PA works to ensure that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education, including poor children, children of color, children with disabilities, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, English Language learners, and other vulnerable children. For more information visit www.elc-pa.org or follow on Twitter @edlawcenterpa.