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April 24, 2024

Philadelphia City Council  
City Hall  
1400 JFK Blvd  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
**Sent via email**

Re: Nominations of Joyce Wilkerson and Reginald Streater

Dear Councilmembers:

We urge you to confirm Joyce Wilkerson and Reginald Streater to the Board of Education. The School District of Philadelphia has come a long way in the last eight years, from a district in perpetual crisis to one that has achieved stability, if not sufficiency. It is imperative that we build on those gains now, and protect against anything that would reverse this progress and take us backwards.

The Public Interest Law Center has a long history of public education advocacy, including serving as co-counsel for the school districts, parents, and statewide organizations that brought Pennsylvania's fair funding lawsuit. For years the School District was largely absent in the broader statewide fair funding efforts generally and our lawsuit specifically.

That changed under the leadership of Joyce Wilkerson. Under her direction, the District achieved broad stability that returned educators to classrooms. At the same time, it also began to conduct much needed advocacy for the actual resources the children of Philadelphia must have. And under her leadership, the District became an important partner in the school funding litigation itself. This meant district leaders (including then-Superintendent Hite and CFO Uri Monson) sharing information, testifying at trial, and helping lead to the landmark finding that the District was unconstitutionally underfunded, without the resources necessary to provide every child a meaningful opportunity to succeed.

In recent years, Ms. Wilkerson has been joined in those efforts by Mr. Streater, a District graduate and parent, who himself has become a critical advocate for Philadelphia children. Their help in moving us to a constitutionally compliant, adequately funded system will benefit every child the District is responsible for, district and charter alike.

We understand that there is an inevitable push and pull between charter schools and the Board that is supposed to provide them oversight. And we know that many charter

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schools are accomplishing extraordinary things despite the pressures of providing an education to children in the poorest big city in America, in a state with some of the biggest opportunity gaps in the nation. But what various scandals in the charter sector demonstrate—from federal convictions for diverting money from children to fund romantic getaways and bonuses,<sup>1</sup> to schools closing on a whim,<sup>2</sup> to admissions practices that weed out students of color<sup>3</sup> or students with disabilities<sup>4</sup>—is that each member of the board has a legal, ethical, and moral obligation to protect charter students by providing effective oversight to charter schools.

We do not always agree with the actions of the District. But those disagreements should not cloud that Ms. Wilkerson and Mr. Streater are dedicated public servants, who act with integrity, and who have a record of caring for all the children of Philadelphia. With the potential for significant funds on the horizon for the District, it is essential that we keep their stable leadership, and continue to build an education system that makes every citizen proud, and provides every child the opportunity to which they are legally entitled.

I am happy to discuss this at your convenience. I can be reached at (267) 546-1316.

Very truly yours,

/S/

Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg  
Senior Attorney

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Roebuck, “Former CEO at Philly music icon Kenny Gamble’s nonprofit convicted of embezzlement, bribery,” Philadelphia Inquirer, March 20, 2024  
<https://www.inquirer.com/news/rahim-islam-shahied-dawan-trial-verdict-universal-companies-kenny-gamble-20240320.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kristen A. Graham and Maddie Hanna, “A deal to save a Philly charter was nearly worked out, but its founder balked. Parents are furious.,” Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 2, 2024 ,  
<https://www.inquirer.com/education/math-civics-sciences-charter-joyner-close-board-20240202.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Maddie Hanna, Kristen A. Graham, and Kasturi Pananjady, “A Philly charter school manipulated its lottery to keep kids out, a top administrator says,” Philadelphia Inquirer, May 7, 2023, <https://www.inquirer.com/family/franklin-towne-charter-high-school-philadelphia-tampering-20230507.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Maddie Hanna, “A Philly charter school denied a young girl’s enrollment because of her ADHD, lawsuit says,” Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 18, 2019,  
<https://www.inquirer.com/education/mathematics-civics-sciences-charter-school-philadelphia-special-education-discrimination-20191018.html>.