February 21, 2017

Dear Senator/Representative:

As another budget season is upon us, it is a stark reminder of the tremendous work that lies ahead in ensuring that students across the Commonwealth have access to quality public education. It’s not just a Philadelphia issue. While Philadelphia has been uniquely affected by budget cuts, rural and urban districts alike—like Reading, Johnstown, York, and Carbondale are a few other examples of areas that are struggling mightily.

Simply put, our children cannot afford another year of political brinksmanship, and funding public education across the board is the moral imperative of every legislator in the state. We are in support of the Governor’s proposed $100M increase in basic education funding and $25M increase in special education funding; and implementing a shale tax and other corporate taxes that will begin to alleviate the tremendous burden borne by Pennsylvania’s children.

There is a huge discrepancy between current per-pupil funding and what is needed to adequately educate our children. More than 30 districts across the state require an investment of at least $3,000 - $5,000 additional dollars per student. Enclosed, you will find data from the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia outlining those district-by-district expenses highlighting the need for additional education funding across the Commonwealth.

In addition to education funding, there are a number of other issues that I ask you to consider:

**The need for a fair and equitable contract for Philadelphia’s educators**

Philadelphia’s educators have gone for 5 years without a raise and more than 4 years without step increases. While costs are rising, thousands of educators are earning $10,000-$15,000 less per year than they would be without frozen wages.

Though the School District has chosen—and failed—to litigate their way out of fairly compensating educators and investing in our children, we have remained willing and able to negotiate a fair contract. As educators go above and beyond for their students, with many getting second jobs to make ends meet, or leaving the system altogether, the need for recognizing the sacrifices they have made is more urgent than ever.

A contract that is good for educators is good for children. Smaller class sizes, functioning water fountains, and preparation time are just some of the components of our collective bargaining agreement. We must have a collective recognition that children and educators have shouldered the burden of years of austerity for too long.


Legislative Concerns

SB 166 & SB 167: Paycheck deception laws
This is anti-worker legislation, plain and simple. Union membership is voluntary in Pennsylvania, and the collection of dues is negotiated. There is no financial gain to restricting this practice, and it would be detrimental to the working men and women who rely on collective bargaining for a fair salary and working conditions.

The notion that union members are required to contribute to the union is unequivocally false. Membership and political contributions are two entirely different deductions, and both must be signed up for independently. We are vehemently opposed to both pieces of outrageous legislation that seeks to silence workers.

SB 228: Economic furlough
Again, this is an ill-advised attempt at circumventing best practices in education and investing in our schools. Adding “economic reasons” while simultaneously adding criteria based on extremely flawed evaluation methods is certainly not a legitimate way to impose austere furloughs. This legislation skirts the true issue of fully funding schools across the Commonwealth, and we are opposed.

SB 229: Elimination of guaranteed sick leave for educators
This legislation eliminates paid sick leave and sabbatical leave requirements that are critical to the stability of the education workforce. Passing this bill will make it harder to recruit and retain educators in Pennsylvania. This legislation would be another attempt to once again unfairly target and scapegoat educators. We are opposed to this legislation.

SB 76: Elimination of property taxes
This is an extremely dangerous piece of legislation, as it puts in immediate danger school funding across the state, in all locales. Enclosed is Penn Budget and Policy Center’s astute analysis of the legislation. We are opposed to this legislation, and encourage legislators to utilize alternative, less fiscally careless, methods of property tax relief.

HB 250: Increase in EITC funding
These funds only further augment inequity in schools by utilizing lucrative tax breaks as a means of funneling money into private and religious schools. Rather than investing in our traditional public schools which are accessible to all children, increased government funding for private schools simply seeks to circumvent our collective responsibility to provide fair and adequate public education to all of our children. We are opposed to this legislation.

HB 2125: “Ghost teacher” legislation
This nonsensical legislation is based on the false premise that educators on union leave are out of the classroom at the expense of children and taxpayers. Educators on union leave is part of our negotiated collective bargaining agreement, and comes at zero expense to the School District or taxpayers. While on leave, union employees’ compensation (salary and benefits) is 100% reimbursed to the District. We are opposed to this illogical anti-union legislation.
February 21, 2017
Page 3

This is not a full list of legislative concerns, but with so much unfolding quickly in Harrisburg and nationally, we wanted to ensure that we reached out to you early in the process and shared our views. Throughout the session, we will monitor any and all pension and/or charter oversight legislation that emerges. We are happy to discuss either issue with you at your convenience.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, concerns, or for more information. I thank you in advance for your investment in the schoolchildren of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

JERRY T. JORDAN
President

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USW - 10-286
all-cio

cc: Governor Tom Wolf
     Pedro Rivera, Secretary of Education
     Mayor Jim Kenney
     Council President Darrell L. Clarke

Enclosures