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April 25, 2018

Hon. Gurbir S. Grewal
Office of the State Attorney General
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex
25 Market Street, Box 080
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080

Dear Attorney General Grewal:

I am writing as Chairman of the Black Parents Workshop Inc, a not-for-profit parental advocacy organization based in Maplewood that works to represent the concerns of students and families of African descent, including African-American, Afro-Latino, Caribbean and African immigrant children in public schools. While established initially to address issues of equity affecting students in the South-Orange Maplewood School District, the Black Parents Workshop is now working in collaboration with parents in Essex, Hudson and Union counties, North Carolina and Colorado.

The purpose of my communication is to call to your attention a pattern of racial profiling of African-American students in the South Orange-Maplewood School District, particularly in Columbia High School, through the disciplinary process and their frequently being subjected to arbitrary searches on the basis of staff's bogus suspicions of these students being under the influence of illegal substances. This is a common practice in the district and one that humiliates and frustrates African-American students and takes a particular toll upon African-American

males. While we share concerns over the existence of drugs in schools, we cannot and do not accept the targeting of African-American students and their being profiled as a ‘suspicious class’ among their peers.

The stereotyping of African-American students in this way negatively impacts their confidence, affects their comfort in the classroom, creates negative perceptions of them among teaching staff, and may ultimately deter their pursuit of post-secondary education opportunities due to their experiences through their K-12 education. The well documented ‘school-to-prison’ pipeline is fed by inconsistencies in the treatment of students in schools and the criminalizing of African-American students in ways that lead to suspensions, expulsions and finally their dropping out of school after effectively being pushed out.

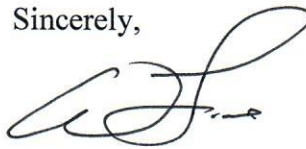
The Black Parents Workshop has filed a federal lawsuit against the school district, *Black Parents Workshop v. South Orange-Maplewood School District* (Case 2:18-cv-02726) in U.S. District Court in the District of New Jersey. The lawsuit follows a U.S. Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights investigation in 2012 that led OCR to determine that the South Orange-Maplewood School District was engaging in practices that denied African-American students access to certain advanced-level and Advanced Placement (AP) classes and disproportionately punished African-American students through the disciplinary process. The school district signed a Resolution Agreement with OCR in 2014 to remedy these practices. Simultaneously, the ACLU, ACLU-NJ and The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the UCLA Civil Rights Project filed a complaint with OCR alleging the existence of these practices. To date, these practices continue and prompted the Black Parents Workshop filing our lawsuit.

As you know, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report that details the manner in which African-American students are disproportionately punished compared to their White peers in all configuration of public schools – traditional K-12 schools, charter schools and magnet schools. The GAO report cited how African-American males are the most frequently targeted for punishment in schools. It is this environment that exists in school districts throughout our state and is well documented in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. We believe these conditions cannot co-exist with the state’s

constitutional mandate to provide a “thorough and efficient” education or the provision of public schools in a racially heterogeneous environment, as the racial tracking of students through the disciplinary process segregates students.

We have previously raised these concerns with your predecessor and were disappointed with the lack of a sense of urgency to address these practices. It is our hope that you will direct an inquiry into this matter and hold our state’s school districts accountable for the manner in which African-American students are singled out for punishment and profiled as drug offenders. Your immediate attention to the practices of the South Orange-Maplewood School District would be most welcome and appreciated at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Fields', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Walter Fields
Chairman
(973) 738-7876 – Direct

cc: Dr. Thomas Ficarra, Interim Superintendent, South Orange-Maplewood School District
Ms. Elizabeth Baker, President, South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education
Mr. Robert L. Tarver, Jr., Legal Counsel, Black Parents Workshop, Inc.