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June 7, 2019

Ms. Rachel Wainer Apter
Director
New Jersey Division on Civil Rights
140 East Front Street, 6th Floor
PO Box 090
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Ms. Apter:

I am writing as Chairman of the Black Parents Workshop, Inc., a not-for-profit legal and public policy organization that advocates on behalf of Black students and their families in the South Orange-Maplewood School District, and other communities. The Black Parents Workshop is currently a litigant in a federal civil rights lawsuit against the South Orange-Maplewood School District based upon our claims of the district's discriminatory practices targeting African-American students. The school district is currently being monitored under a U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Resolution Agreement. The district was previously the target of a federal civil rights complaint brought by the ACLU, ACLU-NJ and the UCLA Civil Rights Project.

The purpose of this communication is to make the Division on Civil Rights aware of a number of complaints the Black Parents Workshop has received from teachers and staff regarding a hostile work environment at Maplewood Middle School in the school district. I have attached the

correspondence this organization has received on this issue. In addition, a parent appeared before the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education during a recent meeting and recounted the hostility a relative was subjected to when the individual showed up at the school to pick up the parent's child. All of these incidents point to the principal of Maplewood Middle School, Ms. Dara Gronau.

In addition, we believe the Board of Education is aware of Ms. Gronau's deficiencies and they have been identified through evaluations that have cited her behavior toward staff. Yet, a faction of the Board, through political manipulation, approved the renewal of Ms. Gronau's contract despite her having submitted a letter of resignation to the district superintendent. We also believe that the superintendent formally issued a non-renewal notice that was subsequently severed from the vote on the principal's resignation and her contract was illegally renewed without any evidence that Ms. Gronau had submitted a letter rescinding her resignation. By doing so, we believe the Board of Education has knowingly supported an employee who has created a hostile work environment in the building she is tasked with leading.

For these reasons, we are asking the Division on Civil Rights to open an investigation into the complaints of a hostile work environment at Maplewood Middle School. We are certain that those staff and teachers who have reached out to our organization will be more than willing to be interviewed by the Division on Civil Rights regarding their experiences.

I look forward to the Division's intervention in this matter and the resolution of the claims brought by these aggrieved employees of the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

Sincerely,

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

Walter Fields
Chairman

(973) 738-7876 – Direct

cc: Ms. Annemarie Maini, President, South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education
Mr. Robert L, Tarver, Legal Counsel, Black Parents Workshop, Inc.