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Statement of Walter Fields
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It is with a profound sense of satisfaction and excitement that I announce today my transition as Chairman of the Black Parents Workshop, Inc. and the naming of James Davis as the new Chairman, effective November 14. I will continue to serve on the Board of Trustees and serve as chairman of the Workshop's Litigation and Policy Committee and direct its work until our current federal lawsuit *Black Parents Workshop v. South Orange-Maplewood School District* is resolved. Upon the litigation's resolution I will resign my seat on the Board of Trustees.

James Davis is an accomplished regulatory attorney and someone who has been a trusted friend and confidant. Most importantly, James is a father and parent of children in the South Orange-Maplewood School District, a former candidate for the Board of Education and someone who knows well the challenges facing Black children in the school district. I have the utmost confidence and trust in James' leadership and capabilities. The Black Parents Workshop Inc. will continue to be a strong advocate for our children in this and other communities that call upon the organization for assistance.

Our litigation against the South Orange-Maplewood School District will continue and we are prepared to bring this matter to trial to make certain the district satisfies the commitments it has

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made in policy. We are thankful for the support of the Oranges-Maplewood NAACP and the Baltimore National Legal Office of the NAACP in this lawsuit. The South Orange-Maplewood School District has yet to comply with the Resolution Agreement the district entered into with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR). It is our intention to hold the district accountable for every commitment it made to the OCR. We will also continue to pursue a judicial ruling on the appointment of the Maplewood Middle School principal that we believe was improper, usurped the role of the superintendent and exceeded the Board's authority as a policy-making body. This matter will also be pursued through the New Jersey School Ethics Commission.

This transition follows a year of planning as I prepare to relocate my family to Maryland by the end of the calendar year in anticipation of my daughter's graduation from the University of Pittsburgh in the spring. This move will also make easier my professional work and facilitate projects with media in the District of Columbia area during the 2020 presidential election cycle as well as provide access to the Maryland state capital in Annapolis. It also comes as I have been readmitted to the doctoral program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) where I was previously a National Science Foundation Fellow in the Political Science and Sociology departments. My past departure from the program was precipitated by NBC News hiring me as a contributor at the launch of MSNBC and MSNBC.com. I will receive my second Master's Degree, a Master of Arts in Political Science, in the spring and will finish my doctoral studies in Maryland. This spring I will also complete the final draft of my book examining the challenges facing Black children in the South Orange-Maplewood public schools and detailing opposition to efforts to end discriminatory practices.

In addition, my relocation to Maryland culminates a year-long planning process with scholars at my Alma Mater, Morgan State University in Baltimore, to conceive a research center that I will lead based upon the work of the Black Parents Workshop, Inc. and focused on Black parental and family engagement in K-12 education nationwide, and education equity. The planning for this research center is in the final stage.

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I leave the South Orange-Maplewood community energized and motivated by the work of the Black Parents Workshop, Inc. in holding the South Orange-Maplewood School District, Board members and administration accountable for its mistreatment of Black students. I am extremely proud of our work in changing district policy on access to courses, addressing the mistreatment of Black students through the disciplinary process, advocating for the integration of all of our schools and classes, provided key input in the revision of the student Code of Conduct, assisting with the creation of the Black Student Union at Columbia High School, providing the district with an opportunity to hire and retain Black teachers, and supporting Black staff that have been wronged. Likewise, our work on behalf of Black children who were victims of police brutality in Maplewood has been very rewarding, as has the relationships we have developed with the leadership of our local police departments in our two communities.

I am equally satisfied that the state School Ethics Commission ruled unanimously against School Board Member Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad on my ethics complaint against her. As is the case with our national leadership, all public officials should be held accountable to the standards of decorum the public should demand and expect. It is clear Ms. Lawson-Muhammad failed that test and no creative storytelling can vindicate her. Likewise, as I maintained, the School Ethics Commission made clear Ms. Lawson-Muhammad's behavior was a matter that should have been discussed by the Board of Education in public session. The constant attempts to evade responsibility, by the Board leadership and Ms. Lawson-Muhammad, would be comical, if not so tragic. I believe that combined with her chronic absenteeism from Board meetings and her support of a widely ridiculed 5th grade slave poster assignment, Ms. Lawson-Muhammad's record and ethics violation should motivate voters to reject her re-election bid. The community can find better elected representation for the Board of Education.

The pathway to the creation of the Black Parents Workshop, Inc. began when my family was represented by the ACLU, ACLU-New Jersey and the UCLA Civil Rights Project in a complaint lodged against the district on behalf of my daughter 7 years ago. It was our family experience and my previous work as political director of the New Jersey NAACP that led to initial discussions on the creation of a Black parents' organization. Our work has inspired other parents

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to organize in communities as far away as Colorado and North Carolina, and within our own state. Black parents in northern Virginia and Maryland are now formally organizing. It is this organizing nationally that will occupy my time in Maryland.

It has been a labor of love to support Black parents and students in this community and deeply gratifying to ignore and frustrate detractors who mistakenly believe social media is an effective weapon of mass confusion. My focus is and has been systemic change backed by a willingness to support Black children by any means necessary. The Black Parents Workshop, Inc. has not been deterred by those who are more concerned with the reputational value of our two communities rather than the quality of life of the Black children who call South Orange and Maplewood 'home.' We cannot and will not be distracted in our work. The reason the two communities are losing Black residents is that Black people are no longer willing to be taxed for their discomfort and injury to their children in exchange for a *suburban* experience. For decades, Black residents have endured a 'Black tax' to pay for private school or exorbitant tutoring costs to compensate for a subpar educational experience, while also enduring the mistreatment of their children. Those costs are no longer acceptable.

I am thankful for the many text messages, emails and phone calls of encouragement from parents and residents who embrace the mission of the Black Parents Workshop. There are many people who have acknowledged our work and we have benefited greatly from their support. I remain a firm believer in the potential of Black children and committed to the cause of equity in public education.

For two towns that champion 'diversity' and feign *progressive* values, the time has come to stop the hypocrisy and live up to the image that is so vigorously promoted to the outside world.

A Luta Continua!

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