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Philadelphia Public School Advocates Push Governor for More Action to Guarantee Schools Open

PHILADELPHIA (August 6th, 2014) – Philadelphia's leading public school advocacy organizations joined in calling for the Governor to back up his words with actions, this morning. In response to Governor Corbett's call for the legislature to return to vote on the legislation authorizing the Philadelphia cigarette tax increase for schools, advocates expressed the need for a definitive agreement by the House and Senate leadership with Governor's call for the lawmakers to return to work and vote the legislation before school starts on September 8th.

Donna Cooper, Executive Director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth said, "The Governor needs to get a written agreement by August 15th from the House and Senate leaders that they will return to work and will bring the legislation to a vote before school starts on September 8th. The Superintendent needs to know this is a certainty by August 15th so that he can responsibly open the schools. The Philadelphia School District is under state control, it's the Governor's job to deliver that certainty. "

Sharon Ward, the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center pointed out, that, "More than one in every 10 public school children in Pennsylvania attends school in the City of Philadelphia. There is no more important issue before the General Assembly than ensuring that these children can get back to school on time."

Commenting the gravity of the situation, Rhonda Brownstein the Executive Director of the Education Law Center, said, "We're deeply concerned about delaying the opening of Philadelphia's public schools. We appreciate Gov. Corbett's effort to ask legislators to return to the Capitol and approve a local tax measure that would generate revenue for the Philadelphia schools. What's critical at this point, however, is an assurance, in writing, from legislators that they will indeed return and approve the bill. The School District of Philadelphia, and the thousands of families and children in the city, need to know as soon as possible if their schools will open on time."

Michael Churchill, an attorney of the Public Interest Law Center for Pennsylvania pressed the point that even with the Cigarette tax increase, the district remains far short of the funds to provide a quality education, "Although the Governor's steps finally to help keep Philadelphia schools open are welcome, 'This is a terrible way to run a railroad'. Philadelphia's students, parents, teachers and administrators deserve well funded schools which are not put through a weekly crisis on whether they have the bare minimum necessary. Legislators should be

ashamed to go on vacation before they finish their work to keep schools open. Even with the cigarette tax, Philadelphia students will have \$2,500 less per student than the average student in neighboring districts, and schools without basics like counselors, nurses and adequate textbooks. It is time the state legislature and governor end this blatant unfairness.”

Darren Spielman, CEO of the Philadelphia Education Fund echoed the sentiments of other advocates, “It’s unacceptable that so many people have had to spend so much time and energy for the simple right to tax our own cigarettes, something city council approved unanimously more than a year ago. We need to spend our energy improving teaching and learning. That’s the way forward. “

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