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June 2, 2015

Jonathan Peri
Chairman of the Special Committee
State Board of Education

Dear Chairman Peri, *Jonathan*

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee about this important issue which will impact the education of current and future students in Washington Township. Decisions like the one before you today should only be made based upon the impact it has on providing students a quality education and its impact on the greater community.

A municipality, under current law, is allowed to petition the state to be transferred to another school district should a thorough study show educational merit. In the case of Washington Township, the reason for many residents to want to leave the Dover Area School District (DASD) is not based on educational merit. Instead, this decision reaches back to 2011 in response to the choice of the Dover Area School Board to close the Kralltown Elementary School. Only days later, the Washington Township Planning Commission formed a task force to explore and pursue an opportunity to secede from the DASD.

Shortly thereafter, a decision was made by members of the Washington Township Education Coalition to circulate a petition which would allow for the township to move from DASD into Northern York County School District (Northern). The petition was signed by 1,406 residents of Washington Township, but only 170 taxable inhabitants had children who could attend school in the district. This means 87 percent of those supporting the move would not have children directly impacted by the move. In fact, the primary impact for most signatories would be reduced property taxes. Simply, many individuals signed the petition because as residents in the DASD, they pay higher property taxes than residents in Northern.

The House of Representatives recently voted to address this problem by passing House Bill 504 with bipartisan support. This legislation would reform school funding while still providing significant property tax reform. As a result of the reforms passed by the House a few weeks ago, Pennsylvanians would see \$4.9 billion in school property tax relief. This means for residents in the DASD, property taxes will be reduced by a total of 47%. It is my belief that if House Bill 504 had been in effect during 2012, the petition before you would have failed to garner enough support to move forward.

This being said, neither the closure of Kralltown Elementary School nor property taxes are valid reasons under current law which requires a move of this nature to be predicated on educational merit. Using the standard set by statute then Secretary of Education Carolyn Dumarersq, found the difference of transportation between districts to be similar. Currently, students travel between 5.7 and 13.9 miles. After the proposed transfer these students would travel between 2.8 and 14.4 to Northern Elementary School and 5 to 12 miles to Wellsville Elementary School. In addition students who currently receive career and technical education at distances of 16.3 to 26.8 miles would now travel 22 to 31 miles.

These school districts overall have very similar performances which were evidenced in the 2014 School Performance Profiles (SPP). According to the data released by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the SPP numbers for the Dover elementary schools were 86.9, 73.0, 83.2, and 81.1 which are similar to Northern elementary school students which scored 88.2, 80.2, 76.3 and 86. The high schools showed similar scores: 73.7 in Dover and 72.8 in Northern. At the intermediate level, Dover scored at 69.9 and Northern scored at 75.5. The similarity of these scores fails to demonstrate superior educational merit from one district to another district as required by law.

In addition to very similar academic performances, this transfer lacks educational merit after considering the additional services DASD provides for its residents. This includes offering students a full-day career and technical education program while Northern only provides a half day kindergarten program and no career or technical education. For working parents, DASD provides busing to day care along with a full day kindergarten program. Northern does not offer this same level of service.

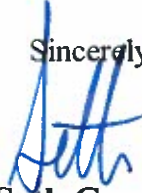
Not only will the transfer negatively impact future students, but will negatively impact current students as well. Students will be forced to leave their current teachers, their current classes and extracurricular activities. Continuity in education is vital to help students achieve academic success. Removing students from their school and from their teachers has shown to lower student performance.

Taxpayers and students who remain in the district will also be adversely affected due to the financial impact on the DASD. If Washington Township leaves the district, it will result in a \$1.7 million loss in revenue. To close this budget deficit, the district will either be forced to raise taxes, increase class sizes, furlough staff or a combination of the three.

Examination of the facts before the committee shows the case of Washington Township is similar to Porter Township in the East Stroudsburg Area School District which lacked sufficient evidence to demonstrate an educational merit or superior education to justify the transfer. Another similarity is the motive used by petitioners. In the case of Porter Township, this motive was concerning property taxes. For Washington Township, the motivation was the closure of the Kralltown Elementary School assisted by a desire for lower property taxes. In the case of Porter Township, the State Board decided there was not sufficient educational merit and denied the transfer. Due to similarities the State Board should likewise deny the petition before us today. In the absence of clear educational merit, I ask the committee and the State Board of Education to deny this petition to prevent a negative impact on our students and our community. I

appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts and wish you well as you ponder this important decision.

Sincerely,



Seth Grove
State Representative
196th Legislative District

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