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NAACP Supports Black Parents Workshop Litigation National Office Authorizes Local Branch to File Amicus Brief

(Maplewood – NJ) – The Black Parents Workshop has announced that the Legal Department of the nation’s oldest civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), has authorized its local Oranges-Maplewood branch to file an amicus brief to support the lawsuit filed by the Workshop against the South Orange-Maplewood School District. This development marks the imprimatur of the national NAACP on the litigation. The NAACP historically, through the *Brown v. Board of Education* litigation in the 1950s, has been at the forefront of school desegregation efforts in the United States. The organization’s local branches can engage in litigation only with the authorization of the national office.

It was the interest of the local branch in the issues raised in the lawsuit by the Black Parents Workshop that initiated the initial discussions between the Workshop and the legal staff of the national NAACP at its Baltimore headquarters.

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Black Parents Workshop Chairman Walter Fields said, “This marks a very significant development. The nation’s oldest and most storied civil rights organization sees our litigation as consistent with its goals for K-12 education. As it did in taking the lead in the fight for equity on behalf of children in southern states, by supporting our litigation the NAACP is reaffirming its stand and leading the way in the fight for equity in the 21st century.” Fields is a former Bergen County NAACP Board member, State Board member and state political director.

The Black Parents Workshop filed a federal lawsuit in 2018 after several years of appealing to the South Orange-Maplewood School District to correct discriminatory patterns of excluding African-American students from rigorous courses in Columbia High School and racial disparities in student discipline. The litigation followed an independent inquiry from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) that resulted in the district signing a Resolution Agreement in 2014 to remedy discriminatory practices and patterns. The school district was also subject to a civil rights complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in 2014 by the ACLU, New Jersey ACLU and the UCLA Civil Rights Project.

Robert Tarver, Legal Counsel for the Black Parents Workshop, noted, “The goal of any civil litigation is to settle a conflict. By declaring its support of our lawsuit, we believe the weight of the NAACP in terms of its experience and credibility will be a positive influence in helping us move toward resolution. The history of this organization speaks to justice and it has no equal in the United States in terms of seeking systemic remedies. Ultimately, we should all be on the same page when it comes to working to support the academic success of Black children. I welcome the NAACP’s expertise in this matter.”

Black Parents Workshop Trustee James H. Davis, III added, “This is an important development because having the support of the local Oranges-Maplewood branch of the NAACP reinforces the important point that working for change at the local level matters. It is easy to get distracted and lost in the glare of national politics and lose sight of the fact that real change begins in your own community. This is a good day for anyone who truly cares about public education at the local level.”

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Over the last five years the Black Parents Workshop has embarked upon efforts to create a more inclusive and representative school district in the communities of South Orange and Maplewood.

The organization has organized fact-finding trips to South Side High School in Rockville Center, Long Island, James Hubert “Eubie” Blake High School in Silver Spring, Maryland and the Christa McAuliffe School in Jersey City, New Jersey to make local school district administrators aware of best practices in the areas of academic access, student discipline and STEM education. The Black Parents Workshop was also asked to play a leadership role in the strategic planning process of the South Orange-Maplewood School District. The organization also set up a meeting with academicians at Morgan State University, a historically Black university in Baltimore, to discuss ways to increase the number of African-American teachers in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. The Black Parents Workshop also arranged a meeting for the district’s superintendent with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund after the organization expressed an interest in helping the district comply with the OCR Resolution Agreement. The organization also established a relationship with and sought counsel from the Consortia for Equity and Excellence under the guidance of Dr. Robert Jarvis, a scholar from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. The Black Parents Workshop also arranged a meeting between Dr. Jarvis and the South Orange-Maplewood School District superintendent to discuss a possible collaboration with the Consortia.

Parent advocate and Black Parents Workshop Trustee Courtney Wicks said, “It is important to recognize that the patterns and practices we see in South Orange-Maplewood are not isolated and are evident in other school districts, suburban and urban. Whether in that community or in a place like Hoboken, deeply gentrified, we must continue to fight to make certain that Black children are being provided a quality, bias-free education and given every opportunity to maximize their potential and succeed.”

“Hopefully,” said Fields, “the involvement of the NAACP will shed light on the recurring issues Black children in public schools in suburban communities face. It is in these places where Blacks are not the majority and underrepresented politically that our children are also at-risk. In these

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places the integration that is seen at the schoolhouse door is a façade for the segregation that occurs behind the classroom door. The promise of *Brown* has been upended by the persistence of intra-school district segregation. It is why we welcome the support of the NAACP. We are talking to several national organizations concerning this lawsuit and anticipate receiving the support of other groups in the future.”

The NAACP was founded on February 12, 1909 out of the historic Niagara Movement. Among its founders were scholar Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and Oswald Garrison Villard. The organization made history in staging a protest against lynching in New York City in the early 20th century. The NAACP quickly became the preeminent voice for civil rights of African-Americans in the United States and was one of the “Big Three” civil rights organizations during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Black Parents Workshop, Inc was founded in 2015 in reaction to patterns of systemic discrimination in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. The organization is a public policy and legal advocacy think tank focused on issues of academic access, racial disparities in student discipline, teacher diversity, school desegregation and reforms in local policing.

The Black Parents Workshop has been sought out by parents in Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and in other New Jersey communities to help bring to light discriminatory practices and help craft strategies to remedy issues of concern. The NAACP brief in support of the Black Parents Workshop is expected to be filed by the end of May.

Attachment

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