



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, October 29, 2020

CONTACT:

Morgan Keller, Communications Manager, ACLU-DE

Phone: 302-654-5326 ext 109, mkeller@aclu-de.org

Sarah Green, Co-chair, Building People Power's S.A.F.E. Schools Issue Campaign

sarah.is.green@gmail.com

S.A.F.E. Schools Calls on Governor Carney to Mandate COVID-19 Testing in Schools

Community organization sees COVID-19 response and school reopening plans as equity issues that require more support at the state level.

WILMINGTON — Days before the election, S.A.F.E. (Safe, Accountable, Forward, Equitable) Schools, a Building People Power issue campaign, sent a letter to Governor Carney, Department of Education Secretary Bunting, and Division of Public Health Director Rattay calling for a statewide mandate requiring the implementation of a standard testing and contact tracing protocol in every Delaware school with support and oversight from the Department of Education to ensure full compliance.

S.A.F.E. Schools is a group of volunteer parents, educators, and advocates who fight for education equity and fair discipline practices in Delaware Schools, and the group believes that more should be done to protect Delaware's school communities in response to COVID-19. This effort is supported by Representatives Chukwuocha, Brady, Williams, and Longhurst, Senators Lockman, Sturgeon, Sokola and Ennis, and New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer, in partnership with ACLU-DE, Building People Power, Network Delaware, Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League, the Wilmington Center for Education Equity and Policy, and more. For the full list of partners, see the letter to Governor Carney, linked at the bottom of this release.

State authorities recently settled a lawsuit putting millions of dollars toward correcting the many inequities in Delaware's public school system. This acknowledgement of the racial and socio-economic segregation in our schools is an important step in rectifying the decades-long neglect. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbates these historic inequities. Statistics clearly show Black and Latinx communities are more at risk of contracting the virus. S.A.F.E. Schools believe that the state has the responsibility to act in a way that has been proven to protect all individuals, including low income and communities of color.

"Across the country and in our state, Latinx and Black communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic," said Sarah Green, Co-Chair of the S.A.F.E. Schools Issue Campaign. "This impact cannot be separated from education. Historic

inequities have created a situation where Black and Latinx families are now most likely to have to send their students to school for in-person learning, which then puts those students, their families, and their educators at a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure.”

The letter, sent on Thursday, October 29, outlines the ways that the current lack of mandated testing and tracing protocol leave some of Delaware’s most vulnerable students and their educators at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. It also presents two case studies of successful protocols in Delaware that could be replicated across the state:

- Delaware State University’s partnership with the nonprofit [Testing for America](#), which aims to prove that frequent testing is the best tool to protect our students and keep schools open. Currently, DSU’s entire population has a <1% positive case rate; 99% of the positive cases have been asymptomatic and would not have been caught without testing.
- Eastside Charter School’s robust testing and tracing system, testing everyone in the building each week, and enabling them to stay safely open since September 16 with zero positive cases.

“In a time when we’re making historic strides toward long overdue education equity in Delaware, we cannot let the weight of this pandemic fall so heavily on the shoulders of Latinx, Black, and low-income students and families and the adults who educate them,” said Shannon Griffin, Senior Policy Advocate at the ACLU of Delaware. “Mandated testing and tracing protocols are quickly becoming a proven method for keeping schools open safely for any students and educators who need to be there through this pandemic. This is an effective measure that our state leaders should take to help ensure the safety of some of Delaware’s most vulnerable students.”

This press release can be found online here:

<https://www.aclu-de.org/en/news/press-release-safe-schools-calls-mandated-testing-tracing-de-schools>

The full letter to Governor Carney can be found online here:

https://www.aclu-de.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_testing_in_schools.pdf

###