



August 9, 2023

Dear Education Committee Member,

Six months have now passed since Commonwealth Court Judge Renee Cohn Jubelirer decreed that the Commonwealth's system of funding public education is unconstitutional and must be rectified. For those of us working to ameliorate the obvious inequity in Pennsylvania schools, this ruling provided great hope that meaningful change to school funding was on the way.

Unfortunately, those of us in the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS), as well as other professional educational groups, have not witnessed observable, meaningful movement within the General Assembly to enact the changes mandated by the Court. We note specifically that the court ruling was not appealed lending even more credence to this landmark court decision.

The Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools is comprised of nearly 250 school districts and intermediate units across the entire Commonwealth. Our member districts are small school districts in rural and remote regions, small urban and suburban districts, and large sprawling districts that cover literally hundreds of square miles. And, our PARSS school districts are charged with educating **all** children in their schools. Our children come from impoverished neighborhoods, some are children of color, some of them are highly disabled, and others come from the most remote parts of the commonwealth. But they all have

one important need – the need to have their schools fully and equitably funded so that each of them receives a high-quality education.

After years of effort, and no final appeal, it is clearly time to move forward to address the unconstitutional funding system that will address the significant funding shortfall for school districts all across this commonwealth. Please understand that we are first-hand witnesses to the struggle that currently exists among our member schools that are dependent upon fair and adequate funding. Every day that goes by without a proper solution has an adverse impact on our schools and our children.

The Court’s ruling provides a golden opportunity to tackle this complex problem and “get it right” on behalf of the children of this commonwealth. Journalist H.L. Mencken once said, “for every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.” Clearly, identifying a viable solution to the commonwealth’s unconstitutional school funding issue will require creative and comprehensive planning and thinking – not a simple fix. PARSS President Matthew Splain might have said it best during his trial testimony.... “this not the time to simply rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic.” Instead, we must ensure that every school district has sufficient funds to provide their children the contemporary, effective education the constitution requires.

Please consider this letter as an offer to help plan, strategize, or contribute to the Basic Education Funding Commission, and any other effort that is formed in response to additional aspects of Judge Jubelirer’s ruling. It is time to work together to arrive at a funding solution that best serves all the children of Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools is here to assist in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Albert, Ed.D

Executive Director of PARSS