

# Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools

For immediate release

November 17, 2014

Members of the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools (APPS) have filed a complaint in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas against The School Reform Commission and Chairman William Green, alleging violations against the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act. Plaintiffs in the case are the Alliance and co-founder Lisa Haver, a retired teacher and education activist. Defendants named are the SRC, Chairman Green and the School District of Philadelphia. The complaint focuses on the acts of the SRC before and during its October 6 meeting, when it voted to cancel its contract with members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

The Pennsylvania Sunshine Act requires all public legislative bodies to give adequate notice of all public meetings, conduct meaningful public deliberation, and allow for public comment before any vote is taken.

APPS, through its attorney Mark Zecca, previously filed a Writ of Summons on November 5 in order to preserve its right to challenge, under the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, the vote taken by the SRC in its October 6 meeting. A letter sent on November 5 to Chairman Green from Haver appealed to Green and the SRC to meet with members of the organization and to rectify its violations of the Sunshine Act voluntarily.

“Public participation is a cornerstone of our democracy, and the opportunity for public participation is required by Pennsylvania law”, said Zecca. Added co-counsel Rich Migliore, “The Sunshine Act embodies public rights which are guaranteed by the Due Process clause of the U S Constitution.”

Haver believes that the court will rule that the SRC violated the letter and the spirit of the Sunshine Act. “As we state in our complaint, the public should expect that the SRC would give adequate advance notice of such a major action, not take pains to shut the public out. The SRC’s actions—not announcing the meeting until the day before, holding the meeting on a workday at 9:30 AM, refusing to disclose the agenda—were a deliberate attempt to shut out the students, teachers and parents who are all affected by this decision”, she said. Haver attended the October 6 meeting, but was not permitted to speak until after the SRC unanimously passed the resolution. “That was a clear violation of the Sunshine Act”, she said.

The Alliance is a grass-roots organization of parents, community members and school professionals fighting for equity in public education. Members of the Alliance regularly attend SRC meetings and have often raised the issue of transparency and public engagement.

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