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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS & MEDIA CONTENT

341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

For Immediate Release

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PPS Board Files Lawsuit v. Allegheny County Seeking Court-Ordered Tax Reassessment to Ensure Financial Viability of City Schools *Statement from PPS Solicitor Ira Weiss*

PITTSBURGH, April 9, 2024 – The Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) filed a lawsuit seeking a court ordered reassessment in Allegheny County. The lawsuit complaint names Allegheny County and County Executive Sara Innamorato in her official capacity as defendants. *(A copy of the lawsuit filing is attached for reference.)*

District Solicitor Ira Weiss stated:

The District had no choice but to take this action given the perilous financial circumstances that have been created due to the real estate tax refunds ordered as the result of hundreds of tax appeals which have been filed resulting from the free fall in the common level ratio.

The largest school district in Western Pennsylvania faces enormous refund liability and an eroded tax base going forward that will impact the District's long-term viability and capacity to serve the students and families throughout the City of Pittsburgh.

We have provided the County Executive with a reasonable time to consider our request to order the reassessment. She has replied with the same general statements about more "review and study." The time has passed for that.

The laws and court decisions of Pennsylvania do not permit this, and it is time to act. PPS has asked the County Executive to decide to do this, and thus far, she has declined. The District has taken such a measure by unanimous vote of its Board.

The refusal of the County's last administration to have a reassessment in 12 years has created an assessment system that is now broken and in violation of the Uniformity Clause of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

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This indefensible refusal to have a reassessment since 2012 has also created a situation where the lower valued properties are over assessed, and higher valued properties are underassessed. This means those at the lower end of the spectrum pay more taxes than they should and those at the higher end pay less than they should. That is simply illegal and unfair.

The bottom line is that the District cannot pay tens of millions of dollars in refunds. It also cannot sit idly by and watch the tax base literally disappear every time there is a wave of reductions and refunds due to the collapse of the assessment system in this County.

If the situation is not stabilized, the District cannot continue to fund the early childhood, preschool and school programs that are essential. The School District, more than any municipal government or the County, relies upon the real estate tax as its “oxygen.” The District does not have access to the array of taxes of other governmental bodies.

We do not file suit against another government entity lightly. However, desperate times call for serious measures. The District needs relief and stability now. We cannot rely upon the mirage of future state legislation providing for state supervised regular reassessments or further studies.

(Solicitor Weiss is available for interviews. He can be reached directly at 412-973-1222.)

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