

# JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

November 2014

Dear Governor-elect Wolf,

Congratulations on your election. You ran on a platform of fighting for all Pennsylvanians and ensuring workers' rights. With this in mind, we write to you on an issue of great concern to our community.

As leaders of the Jewish community in Philadelphia we wish to express our grave concern over the recent actions by the School Reform Commission (SRC). The SRC's decision to abrogate the collective bargaining agreement negotiated by Philadelphia's public school teachers will heighten the crisis in our schools, harming students and our community. Now is a time for reflection and prudence.

The Jewish community has long held education in high esteem, as both a functional necessity and a spiritual practice. Universal primary education has been a Jewish tenet for millennia, and our community has benefited from this commitment. We are enjoined by scripture to hold fast to education (Proverbs 4:13) and by our scholars to recognize the importance of educators (Sanhedrin 17b). We also acknowledge the right of workers to band together and bargain collectively as the basis for a just society.

With these values in mind, we have been troubled by the ongoing funding crisis in Philadelphia schools. The recent decision of the SRC to move away from the process of collective bargaining and the mutually agreed upon contract is a disturbing one. Denying workers a fair contract or the right to bargain for one does nothing to solve the political impasse that lies at the heart of the crisis. Increasing labor strife in our schools will only harm those who most need a calm learning environment. Disrespecting and degrading teachers is not a path to better education.

We recognize the complexity of the issue and the political will necessary to make real progress. We call on all parties to come together in a spirit of *kavod* (honor) *tzedakah* (justice), recognizing that they are charged with a crucial community function, the education of our children.

We, the undersigned, call on you to:

- Use the power of your office and the political capital of your election to bring the SRC back to the negotiating table which it abandoned.
- Restore the \$1 billion dollars in cuts your predecessor made in school budgets.
- Bring Pennsylvania into alignment with the majority of US states by enacting a full, fair, funding system for our schools.

Your campaign mobilized the labor and Jewish communities to support your vision for Pennsylvania's future. We are confident that your leadership on this issue will produce real progress.

Sincerely,

Michael Hersch  
Rabbi Mordechai Liebling,  
Rabbi Lauren Grabelle-Herrmann  
Rabbi Eli Freedman  
Rabbi Avi Winokur  
Rabbi Julie Greenberg  
Rabbi Meryl M. Crean  
Rabbi Ira Stone  
Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Director, Philadelphia Jewish Labor Committee  
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