

Joint Statement from Education Law Center and Public Interest Law Center on Gov. Shapiro's FY26 Budget Proposal

(Feb. 4, 2025) Last July, in a historic bipartisan agreement, the General Assembly and the governor admitted that Pennsylvania underfunds its schools by more than \$4.5 billion and took the first step toward fixing it, allocating \$500 million to the state's most underfunded districts. These were necessary steps to respond to Commonwealth Court's February 2023 decision declaring Pennsylvania's school funding system inequitable, inadequate, and unconstitutional.

Today Gov. Shapiro rightfully reminded the General Assembly that there is still much work ahead to adequately fund our schools, proposing an additional \$500 million to close the state's shortfall, consistent with the agreement leaders reached last year. That new funding will be put to good use, extending kindergarten to full days, expanding afterschool tutoring, reopening school libraries, reducing class size in early grades, and more.

There are other cautions in this budget, however, which the General Assembly must address. First, the current timeline for reaching adequacy remains too slow and means that today's kindergartners will be nearing high school before schools have the funds the state admits they need to succeed. Second, the proposed allocations for basic education (\$75 million) and special education (\$40 million) fall far below the rate of inflation. Underfunding other line items will prevent many school districts from ever reaching adequacy, as they use that funding to fill budget holes, rather than investing in new school staff and programs. All of this makes it especially critical for the Commonwealth to finally enact the cyber charter funding reform proposed by the governor.

We also know that additional funding is needed to remedy school facilities and ensure access to high-quality pre-K – both of which the court recognized as key components of a thorough and efficient system of public education.

A child's time in school is a precious resource that we cannot afford to waste. We urge the General Assembly to take the baton from the governor, shorten the timeline for closing the adequacy gap, increase the basic education and special education line items, enact the cyber charter reform, and commit to a plan to bring our state into compliance. The Constitution requires it.