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June 20, 2017

Hon. Christopher S. Porrino  
Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex  
25 Market Street, Box 080  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080

Dear Attorney General Porrino:

I am writing on behalf of the South Orange-Maplewood (SOMA) Black Parents Workshop, a policy advocacy not-for-profit organization that works on behalf of the parents of African-American and African-Caribbean immigrant students in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. Due to the recent revelation of elevated lead levels in the drinking water of our schools, and athletic complex, we are requesting an investigation by your office to determine if the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education may have acted in a criminally negligent way in concealing the true extent of lead contamination in our school buildings, and facilities.

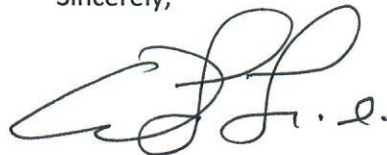
The most recent testing of water samples in our schools follows prior testing approximately one year ago. We are alarmed by the spike in lead levels over a one-year period and believe the initial test results were either purposely underreported or the real results from that first test were not those reported publicly. In addition, the Board of Education has not released the full report(s) from the testing company and therefore the public is working at a serious disadvantage in determining the actual health risks posed to our children.

We are particularly concerned with the lead levels in water samples taken from the Seth Boyden Elementary School, a school that has the largest population of African-American and lower-income students in the school district. We are alarmed by the testing at Seth Boyden because the South Orange-Maplewood School District has been investigated by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights for discriminatory practices against African-American students, and signed a Resolution Agreement with OCR stipulating it would cease the identified practices. To date, though, we contend the district has failed in fulfilling the terms of that agreement. In addition, there have been numerous incidents of racial bias in the school district that has frustrated many students and parents. Given this history, and the racial segregation that persists in the district, we lack confidence in the Board of Education's ability or willingness to operate in a transparent and trustworthy manner.

Our concern is heightened by the developments in Flint Michigan and manner in which that community was abused by elected officials. As in the case with Flint, the management and condition of infrastructure, in this case public school buildings, and related facilities, rests upon the decisions of individuals with a legal obligation to exercise a "duty of care" in the discharge of their responsibilities. We believe the South Orange-Maplewood School District has been negligent in that regard, and that the district's elected leadership, past and present, must be held accountable. The regular channels of public engagement are insufficient in this regard.

In addition to opening an inquiry of the South Orange-Maplewood School District, we respectfully request a meeting with you, or your designated staff, during which parents can convey their legitimate concerns to you regarding this matter. I may be reached at the number listed above or on my cell phone, 973 738-7876. We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Fields', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Walter Fields  
Chairman