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Dear State Board of Education and Pennsylvania Department of Education Stakeholders,

We, Aarushi Dedhiya and Naina Bhatia, serve as student representatives to the Pennsylvania State Board of Education. Furthermore, we are the co-directors for Students for Education in Pennsylvania (SEPA), a statewide program that helps bring student voices from across the Commonwealth to the State Board of Education and allows students of all backgrounds to share their feedback on education initiatives or topics.

One important topic that came up in SEPA was creating more accessible resources for immigrant students. There has been a substantial increase in migrant students in many areas across Pennsylvania. Cities like Philadelphia are known to be diverse areas, and because of this, they are more equipped to handle an influx of immigrant students. However, this is not the case for many other areas. For example, in the last two years, the immigrant population in Charleroi, Pennsylvania has increased by more than 2,000%. Despite the many immigrant students entering schools in different parts of Pennsylvania, many schools are still not equipped to handle the needs of these students. Additionally, there is a lack of translated resources for non-Spanish-speaking students in Pennsylvania. Because of the enormous increase of immigrant students in Pennsylvania, numerous new languages are being introduced.

Thus, we recommend that Pennsylvania develops and actively updates a language access toolkit for immigrant families and students. This would be similar to Washington House Bill 1153: legislation passed in Washington State to include an immigrant access toolkit.

We have a potential outline for our recommended toolkit. There would be a self-assessment to evaluate language access services within a school and then, provide feedback to help us understand their needs. Additionally, the toolkit would contain a guide to help families better understand how the language education system works for ELL students, information about the family's language access rights, glossaries of education terminology in students' respective languages, building points of contact for language access services, and translated course guides for each new English-learner. This resource would also include the best practices for using interpreter and translation services that are provided by the district. We recommend starting with Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Nepali, and Vietnamese because they were found to be the most spoken languages among English Learners in Pennsylvania.

We hope the toolkit will be designed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Then, each respective school district will provide the immigrant student and family with the toolkit at their LIEP (Language Individualized Education Plan) meeting. Finally, the family can use the toolkit in the most beneficial way for them.

Thank you for your consideration, and we appreciate the support from the State Board and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Sincerely,

Aarushi Dedhiya, Senior Student Representative to the State Board of Education

Naina Bhatia, Junior Student Representative to the State Board of Education

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