



April 29, 2011

By U.S. Mail and Fax, 860.722.8114

Saundra Kee Borges, Esq.
Office of Corporation Counsel
550 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103

**Re: "Choose Hartford" Campaign Undermines *Sheff*
Agreement**

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Dear Ms. Kee Borges:

As you know, the City of Hartford was not one of the original parties in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, but moved to intervene in the case in 2007 due to "[t]he City's interest in participating in formulation of future remedies to reduce the racial, social, and economic isolation of Hartford's public school children."¹ Therefore, we were dismayed to read about the "Choose Hartford" campaign which urges parents to accept their children's placement in the Hartford Public Schools and conveys the message via television, radio, and print, that any participation in interdistrict programs or Open Choice poses an educational risk for children.² That the City of Hartford would orchestrate this campaign is wholly inexplicable and inappropriate. Hartford is a party in *Sheff v. O'Neill* and it must be committed to advancing the goals set forth in the 2008 *Sheff* settlement agreement ("Agreement"). The "Choose Hartford" campaign will undermine that Agreement and deter parents and children from exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to a broad range of high quality, integrated educational opportunities.

As parties to *Sheff*, we all must work together to meet the goals set forth in the Agreement. The Agreement's explicit language recognizes that "the parties have a mutual interest in reducing the racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of students in the Hartford Public Schools." It sets forth various mechanisms for reducing that isolation, including voluntary

¹ *Sheff v. O'Neill*, No. X07-CV-890492119S, 2007 WL 123743, at 2* (Jan. 4, 2007) (quoting the City of Hartford's brief in support of its motion to intervene in the case).

² Hartford Public Schools, Press Release, Hartford Families Receive Their School Placement Letters, April 27, 2011.

interdistrict magnet schools, state technical schools, charter schools, and Open Choice.

Despite our collective efforts to maximize quality integrated educational opportunities for children in Hartford, the goals set forth in the Agreement are far from being met. At this time, we have not reached the goal of 35% of Hartford-resident minority students having access to educational opportunities in a reduced-isolation setting.

The "Choose Hartford" campaign will make it even more difficult for the parties to meet the goals of the Agreement. By design, the campaign, and in particular the inappropriate reference made to the value of the lottery and the waitlist process, will discourage parents and children from seeking and choosing integrated educational opportunities. In doing so, the campaign will prevent children from pursuing education opportunities to which they are constitutionally entitled.

On behalf of the *Sheff* Plaintiffs, we request that the City of Hartford immediately take the following steps:

1. Revise the "Choose Hartford" media campaign so that it does not suggest that participation in interdistrict programs and the Open Choice program may pose an educational risk for children.
2. Use the "Choose Hartford" campaign and/or other public education campaigns to educate parents and children about all the opportunities available to them under the 2008 *Sheff* Agreement.
3. Provide the parties with written confirmation that the aforementioned steps have been taken by the close of business on Thursday, May 5, 2011.

We expect this matter to be resolved promptly. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Dennis Parker
Martha Stone
Vincent Southerland
Kimberly Liu
Elora Mukherjee

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

cc: Jane Comerford, Esq.
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