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**PHILLY HEALTHY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE STATEMENT ON JB KELLY MOLD OUTBREAK**

**[Philadelphia, PA]** – The following is the statement from the Philly Healthy Schools Initiative (PHSI) regarding the recent mold outbreak and week-long school closure at JB Kelly Elementary in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia:

“As local parents, teachers, community members and concerned Philadelphians have learned about the health threats from an extreme mold outbreak at the JB Kelly School, the Philly Healthy School Initiative has been provided with information from parents, school staff and others with knowledge of the specific situation and we have been barraged with questions and concerns about the true scale and scope of the problems at Kelly. As briefly summarized below, we’ve come to understand that there are long-standing problems at this school and not just with mold, but also with asbestos, ventilation, inadequate levels of cleaning and much else and our members believe urgent public attention, involvement and engagement is needed here and throughout our public schools in order to ensure they are healthy and safe.

1) There are major problems with the school ventilation, heating and cooling systems. Not only was the ventilation system found to be extremely dirty and only very partially functioning, but there are concerns about air quality throughout the building;

2) Asbestos is present in the building and has been impacted by moisture and mold, in turn resulting in asbestos removal being done at JB Kelly. The asbestos issue in our school buildings is a major concern of the PHSI coalition members and one we are trying to aggressively address. Although we don’t know the exact details or the extent of asbestos problems and work at JB Kelly, any asbestos removal must be taken seriously. PHSI is greatly concerned about this asbestos issue, now and moving forward, and we feel strongly that more information must be provided to the public as quickly as possible; and

3) We have been told that the overall conditions in the building are incredibly deteriorated, and that dust, dirt and other particulates exist throughout JB Kelly. These can impact the health of students and staff, especially for those with respiratory issues such as asthma.

We also know that the teacher’s union [PFT] has been heavily involved in working with the District over the past week to push to make sure **everything** gets cleaned up and fixed at Kelly. The union’s involvement is a critical stakeholder element but even broader public participation is needed.

As we release this statement we – public, parents and other stakeholders - still don’t know the full extent of the problems or the current status of the fixes at Kelly. Comprehensive and accurate information is something that the entire school community, including parents deserves to be provided with.  While we are hopeful that everything that was needed to be done has been done, we also need to engage in ongoing discussions about how to prevent and better address these problems in the future.”

We now know that as of Wednesday, October 18th, kids and staff have returned to JB Kelly. We believe that full disclosure of all issues, all problems, all contaminants – mold, asbestos, lead, other – must now immediately be made publicly available, and that all key stakeholders provided to full access to this information.

The mold outbreak and glacially slow response by the School District of Philadelphia is just the tip of the toxic iceberg when it comes to the environmental health threats found in the city’s school buildings. It was only weeks ago that a massive mold outbreak occurred at Munoz-Marin Elementary School, contaminating over 20,000 square feet of the building’s ventilation systems, surfaces like walls and ceilings, as well as furniture, books and other school supplies.

Egregiously, in the six months since we created the Philly Healthy Schools Initiative, our research has shown that these health risks are not isolated— in fact that more than 3 dozen schools have had significant mold, asbestos and/or lead problems - and that time and again the School District has either been chronically slow to respond, or just turns a blind eye when we’ve uncovered these health threats.

It’s unfortunate that no steps have been taken to heed our warnings until we’re faced with a “worst case scenario” like JB Kelly Elementary.

At the same time, the case of JB Kelly Elementary highlights the very solutions that the Philly Healthy Schools Initiative has been pleading for officials at the School District, SRC and city government to take for months. These solutions include:

* Improve the public’s **Right to Know** and School District transparency;
* **Increase engagement** of parents, teachers, and the public;
* Establish a **Public Stakeholder Advisory Committee/Task Force** for Philadelphia School Facilities Maintenance, Operations, Capital & Environmental Work;
* **Stabilize all school buildings** by immediately identifying, categorizing, prioritizing & addressing urgent, critical safety hazards;
* Establish **“Adequate Building Conditions”** that are the bare minimum standards for a healthy learning environment in our school buildings;
* **Improve communication** and sharing of best practices between schools, and within and between SDP Facility Maintenance, Operations, Capital & Environment Departments & staff;
* **Increase funding** for our education systems;

We hope that the something positive can come out of the ongoing health risk posed at JB Kelly that’s finally being uncovered and garnering the attention it deserves: that city and School District officials will implement these commonsense solutions that will protect the health of our children, teachers and building workers, improve the quality of our schools and education system, and save taxpayers money by avoiding expensive environmental health problems in our schools before they occur.

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***The Philly Healthy Schools Initiative is a citywide coalition made up of parent organizations including Parents United and Friends of Neighborhood Education, Philadelphia’s labor community including the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, SEIU, and AFL-CIO, and environmental and public health organizations like PennEnvironment and Physicians for Social Responsibility. To learn more or get more information, please contact David Masur at PennEnvironment at*** [***DavidMasur@PennEnvironment.org***](mailto:DavidMasur@PennEnvironment.org) ***or at (215) 732-5897.***