



News for Immediate Release

Nov. 30, 2012

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Responds to Reading School Board Criticism, Announces Resignation of Commissioner

Harrisburg – Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission today issued the following statement addressing a Reading School Board member’s claims of bias and announcing the resignation of Commissioner Ismael Arcelay of Bethlehem:

“The January 2012 settlement between the Reading School Board and the Pa. Human Relations Commission confirmed our mutual goal of ensuring educational equity for all students in Reading public schools, regardless of race or ethnicity,” Executive Director JoAnn L. Edwards said. “The state and the district have forged a partnership to take tangible measures to increase opportunities for students, increase educator diversity and improve school safety.

“These are no easy challenges, and neither party has taken the task lightly.

“The settlement required the district to hire an equity coordinator by July 1, 2012 and to appoint a volunteer equity panel. Recognizing that the district is 76 percent Hispanic or Latino, with many students and parents not native English speakers, we also required the district to actively recruit a bilingual, bicultural person to fill the role.

“On Nov. 26, the commission wrote Superintendent Purcell requesting that the board hold off on hiring any candidate until it had been determined whether terms of the settlement had been fulfilled.

“No commission representative was present when the board responded to our request by voting to table the hiring decision. We learned of the decision in a Nov. 29 Reading Eagle article, which also reported that a school board member criticized the commission, saying commission members applied for the job and were not chosen.

“We immediately contacted Superintendent Purcell, expressing our concern at the accusations raised in the article, and assuring her that we were investigating any possibility that one of our commissioners or senior staff members applied for the position.

“We determined that indeed, Commissioner Ismael Arcelay had applied for the job, without recognizing the conflict he created in doing so. He had never notified any commissioner or staff member of his actions.

“He immediately resigned his position as commissioner, with great regret at having compromised the commission’s partnership with the district.

“We sincerely hope we can move forward in our work with the district, recognizing our common goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all Reading students. The education of our children and the economic prosperity of our communities depend on it.”

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