



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS JOIN FORCES, ADVOCATE LITERACY AS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT**

(INDIANAPOLIS, IN) In collaboration with peers from the International Literacy Association (ILA), a global advocacy and membership organization dedicated to advancing literacy, and the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), an international organization whose mission is to advance and advocate for equity and social justice through multicultural education, Kappa Delta Pi (KDP), an international organization committed to quality education for all, extends support to the issues of literacy brought to light in a recent federal class action lawsuit in the state of Michigan.

The suit, filed in September 2016 against the Michigan governor and certain state officials, alleges that the student members of the plaintiff class have been denied their constitutional right of access to effective literacy instruction by the Detroit public and charter schools in violation of the U.S. Constitution. In these schools, children are taught in overcrowded and unsanitary classrooms, by unprepared staff, and with a dearth of textbooks and other key educational materials. These are just a few of the allegations filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan on behalf of students in five struggling, overwhelmingly minority Detroit schools.

The student plaintiffs allege that the defendants have denied them “access to the most basic building block of education: literacy.” According to Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean of the University of California, Irvine, School of Law and one of the attorneys for the plaintiff class, the suit contends that the government has the obligation to provide educational access to “at least minimal literacy in order for someone to function in society.” As a result, Chemerinsky says, “this has the potential to be the *Brown v. Board of Education* for the next generation.”

The organizations of KDP, ILA, and NAME have filed an *amicus curiae* brief, or friend of the court brief, through the Chicago law firm of Korein Tillery LLC. In the brief, KDP, ILA, and NAME support the suit and the issues it is trying to address and demonstrate to the judge that members of the teaching profession find the issues valid.

At the heart of the plaintiffs’ case is the constitutional right to literacy. In support of the case, the *amicus curiae* brief put forth by KDP, ILA, and NAME contends that access to at least a ninth-grade level of literacy (as determined by Flesch-Kincaid and Lexile metrics) is constitutionally protected because such a reading level is a prerequisite to be able to meaningfully exercise First Amendment rights, effectively participate in the political process, and engage in numerous other recognized constitutional rights.

The societal problems of illiteracy are well-known. Adequate education levels, especially those regarding literacy, are strongly correlated with a wide range of positive outcomes, including the significant benefits of higher earnings, better health, and decreased crime rates. Inadequate literacy, conversely, comes with a very

high cost in those areas, as well as financially. In the United States, according to the World Literacy Foundation, the estimated cost of illiteracy is \$362 billion annually.

When citizens are, at most, functionally illiterate, they may be able to read and write simple words, but cannot apply these skills to necessary tasks such as reading a medicine label, filling out a job application, or reading a bank statement. And poor literacy also limits a person's ability to engage in activities that require either critical thinking or basic literacy and numeracy skills, such as using a computer to complete a tax form, communicating with others via email, and voting in elections, let alone completing a higher education degree.

The effects of illiteracy are similar in both developing and developed countries, and they are cyclical and nearly irreversible. "Once they [students] are behind, it's impossible for them to catch up," stated Evan Caminker, Dean of the University of Michigan Law School. People who are illiterate become trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for employment or income generation, and higher chances of poor health, turning to crime, and becoming dependent on social welfare or charity. This pattern continues through future family generations.

Part of the answer is, of course, increasing funding, as well as making schools more equitable. Caminker added, "The root of it really is making the state understand that they need to pay attention and they need to care about these kids as much as they care about the kids in [the more affluent] Grosse Pointe, in Ann Arbor and in Lansing."

And given the dynamic nature of communication in the world today, society increasingly requires broader, more intensive, and more complex forms of literacy. Adults must be able to use contemporary tools of literacy and become adaptable to forms of reading and writing that are expected for education, work, health maintenance, social and civic participation, and other life tasks.

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*Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education, is a 501 (c) (3) organization established in 1911 to recognize and promote excellence in education, provide a reasoned voice for significant issues, and link learning communities of educators. Through its programs, services, and strategic partnerships, KDP supports the professional growth and teaching practices of educators throughout all phases and levels of their careers. The organization currently has more than 600 chapters and an active membership of nearly 40,000 worldwide.*