**STATEMENT OF MARK ROSENBAUM**

State government has no higher responsibility than to ensure that its system for public education deliver to every child the capacity to become literate – to read, write, and comprehend in order to have a shot at the American dream. Access to literacy is our society’s essential precondition for social mobility and civic participation in a democracy. Where state officials deny access to literacy to children of color from low income families, they therefore perpetuate the most terrible racial inequality government can inflict on its most vulnerable and deserving populations.

This morning, Public Counsel, the law firms of Sidley Austin and Miller Cohen and the law professors Evan Caminker and Erwin Chemerinsky have filed the first federal civil rights lawsuit in our nation’s history in order to secure the right of access to literacy. We bring this class action on behalf of Detroit students at all grade levels, in elementary, middle, and high schools. The specific schools described in our complaint include DPS schools and charter schools, in other words all manner of schools under the State’s control and authority. Our suit is the next great step on the historic “walk to freedom” begun by Rev. Franklin and Dr. King over a half century ago, and carried on for generations by Detroit students, families, teachers, and community members.

According to national assessment data collected by the federal government, Detroit public School students rank last among all major school districts in literacy ad they have been so ranked for four consecutive reporting periods. These appalling outcomes and the persistent, abysmal conditions at Detroit schools are unprecedented in our nation, yet literacy is the cornerstone of all education, as it is the cornerstone of our democracy. Absent literacy, a child has no way to obtain knowledge, communicate with the world, or participate in the institutions and activities of citizenship.

By Michigan’s own accountability system, ranking schools from 1 to 100, schools we feature in our complaint were ranked one, two, four, and six. At Hamilton, for example, 100% of the 6th graders score below proficiency in both reading and math, 97% in fourth grade. Third graders cannot go beyond picture books. 100% of 11th graders at Osborn Evergreen are below proficiency in math, science, and social studies, 89% are below proficiency in English/Language Arts, and 96% are below proficiency in writing.

Yet schools in Detroit opened up last week without even the bare necessities that make a school a school. At the schools we feature in our Complaint, students returned from summer break to find that there were no teachers in many core curricular subjects, no books for them to use individually in their classrooms or to take home to do homework, classroom temperature hovering around 100 degrees such that school had to be dismissed early on the first day and students and teachers threw up and passed out. We have documented that, in some of these schools, individual teachers had to spend hundreds to thousands of dollars from their meager salaries just to stock their classrooms with basic supplies. The teaching of seventh and eighth grade math classes was assigned to an eighth grader. Teachers were provided a handful of battered history textbooks dated 1998 when the president was Bill Clinton, and during winter students had to huddle in overcrowded classrooms wearing layers of winter clothes, shivering and seeing their breath if they spoke.

The children of Detroit are not just being denied access to literacy, they are being denied even a basic education. The schools the state is assigning them to are not schools by any functional definition. Would Governor Snyder assign the children of Grosse Pointe or Ann Arbor to the schools of Detroit? The foolproof test as to whether the schools in our Complaint afford access to literacy is a simple one – would Governor Snyder send his children to any of these schools?

Our ask in our suit is modest – institute evidence-based literacy instruction in our schools, provide the teachers, training and tools necessary to do so, eliminate all physical and other conditions that stand in the way of students learning and teachers teaching.

It costs far more not to educate a child than to educate one. What’s riding on this case and the great struggle it joins is the future of Detroit’s children, Detroit’s families, and Detroit itself.