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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL
January 31, 2025

Peter Greene
Bucks County Beacon
pagreene@outlook.com

Re: Commonwealth Charter Academy

Dear Mr. Greene:

We represent Commonwealth Charter Academy (CCA), which was recently the subject of a false and defamatory report published on your news site.

On January 27, 2025, Education Voters of Pennsylvania (Ed Voters) released a “report,” titled *Our Taxes, Their Slush Fund*, that purports to analyze the expenditures of Commonwealth Charter Academy (CCA). Your news site published a story on this report shortly after its release.

Upon reviewing the report, the documents on Ed Voters’ website, and the source documents provided by CCA in response to Right to Know Law (RTKL) requests, CCA discovered numerous significant errors, falsehoods and intentional omissions aimed at maligning and defaming CCA. These false statements and omissions invalidate the report’s findings and undermine the credibility and the legitimacy of Ed Voters and its parent organization, the Keystone Research Center.

As a result of these egregious errors, CCA is notifying you and the other media outlets that reported this information urging you and them to retract and correct their news stories.

The Ed Voters report contains multiple inaccuracies, including, among other untruthful items, the following items that **incorrectly inflate the total amount of expenditures held up to ridicule by at least \$64.5 million**:

- A payment to a CCA staff member for \$94,500.
 - **The actual amount paid was \$945 – a difference of \$93,555, or 100 times lower than the amount reported by Ed Voters.**
 - This false information was cited twice in the report in an attempt to create a cloud of impropriety over CCA, even though the actual payment was significantly lower than Ed Voters reported and was made to reimburse a staff member for tuition for a continuing education program, which is common practice in all public schools.
- A payment to a vendor for \$766,421.

- **The actual amount paid was \$7,664.21 – a difference of \$758,756.79, or 100 times lower than the amount reported by Ed Voters.**
- A payment to a vendor for \$7,344,718.
 - **The actual amount paid was \$73,447.18 – a difference of \$7,271,270.82, or 100 times lower than the amount reported by Ed Voters.**
- A payment to a vendor for \$56,990,511.
 - **The actual amount paid was \$569,905.11 – a difference of \$56,420,605.89, or 100 times lower than the amount reported by Ed Voters.**
- Duplicate listing of payments, which increased the number and total amounts of payments highlighted by Ed Voters in its report.
- Stating that CCA did not identify the basis for redactions of individual names when, in fact, CCA explained the redactions by color-coding to identify different categories (i.e., staff, student/caretaker, family mentor) and providing citations to the RTKL exemptions associated with the redactions.

Additionally, the Ed Voters report objects to the redaction by CCA of personally identifiable information, but CCA had specifically explained to the RTKL requester that the redacted information includes:

- The names of caretakers who received payments under CCA’s Community Class Reimbursement program;
- The names of family mentors who perform services for CCA, including assisting newly enrolled families with successfully transitioning to CCA and online learning; and
- The names of staff who received payments under CCA’s Tuition Reimbursements program.

It is important to note that CCA is required by federal and state laws and by constitutional provisions to protect the privacy of students, families, and staff by preventing their personally identifiable information from being made public.

In a rush to publish this information at what it deemed to be a politically opportune moment, Ed Voters used poor research methods and sloppy analysis, resulting in a report filled with inexcusably exaggerated errors, untruths and inaccuracies. When converting documents to a spreadsheet format, Ed Voters shifted decimal points, replaced numbers with alternate text, and removed CCA’s categories, failing to validate the data with CCA’s source documents. Consequently, the report published demonstrably false factual information, which was then republished by your news site.

As a statewide public cyber charter school and the second-largest public school entity in Pennsylvania, CCA enrolls over 33,000 students from all 67 counties, employs more than 2,400 staff, and has an operational budget of more than \$500 million. While Ed Voters alleged that CCA misuses taxpayer dollars, most expenditures highlighted in its report are for necessary travel-related expenses, which are customary for organizations of similar size with a statewide presence.

All public schools in Pennsylvania incur travel-related expenses. As a statewide public school, CCA staff must travel to meet with students and families, conduct state testing, enforce attendance and truancy laws, and organize field trips for students’ academic growth and socialization.

It is also common to find purchases for school supplies, facilities repairs, and other products used in the normal course of operations of a public school from cost-effective and reliable vendors such as Amazon, Home Depot, Target, Lowes, and other retailers. Attempting to draw a negative inference from the appearance of these vendors on a check register is maliciously disingenuous.

Every taxpayer dollar CCA receives is used to provide a high-quality, flexible, and customizable education to all enrolled students. Nearly 95% of families choose to return to CCA each school year, demonstrating CCA's effectiveness for tens of thousands of students and families across Pennsylvania.

CCA is audited annually by experienced, independent, reputable firms, with no negative findings or indications of improprieties having been identified. These audits, along with the annual Charter School Report, school budget, and Annual Financial Report, are filed with the State Department of Education and are publicly available.

Due to the falsehoods in Ed Voters' report, CCA and its officers and trustees are contemplating legal action against Ed Voters, its executive director, its parent organization, and all involved in spreading defamatory information about CCA.

This is the second report from Ed Voters in less than a year containing false information. The previous report, issued in May 2024, included inaccurate information about real estate allegedly owned or leased by CCA. Falling prey to Ed Voters' continuing pattern of purveying falsehoods about CCA would reflect imprudent judgment. Republishing those falsehoods, after being placed on notice about them, could be legally actionable.

Ed Voters is an anti-school choice organization, funded principally by what the *Philadelphia Inquirer* described as "left-leaning" advocacy organizations, that does not represent voters who overwhelmingly support school choice. Instead, it speaks for traditional public education establishment organizations that aim to weaken or eliminate school choice options for Pennsylvania families.

While CCA values transparency and accountability, it also believes that it is crucial for the public to receive accurate and trustworthy information.

We ask that your news organization immediately publish a correction or retraction of the materially false and defamatory statements made about CCA by Ed Voters and remove any of the previous reports about this matter that are contained on your website.

Very truly yours,

Philip J. Murren

Philip J. Murren

cc: Hon. Jeffrey A. Piccola
Thomas D. Longenecker