

MEDIA RELEASE

New Statewide Report Reveals Illinois Charter Schools Leave Health and Safety Behind

Only 10% of Illinois Health and Safety Laws Explicitly Applicable to Both Charter and District-Run Public Schools

For More Information:

Jill Wohl, 773-562-0159 (cell); Amy Zimmerman, 773-988-8058 (cell)

February 10, 2015, Chicago – A new report from the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children outlines an incomplete patchwork of health, wellness, and safety regulations within the Illinois school system; compares charter and district-run school policies toward management of chronic and other health-related issues; and recommends streamlining and improving health, wellness, and safety within the Illinois charter system in order to foster healthier schools, students and communities.

The report found that only a small percentage – 8 of 77 Illinois health, and safety regulations – that apply to public schools are also applicable to charter schools throughout the state. “Every student deserves the same health and safety protections that children across the state – or a district – are entitled to,” states Illinois Representative Robyn Gabel (18th District), who is sponsoring legislation HB 1360 to amend the Charter Schools Law to better protect the health and safety of all Illinois students.

Given that charter schools are the fastest-growing sector of public education in the United States, and that charter school laws in many other states contain health and safety language similar to Illinois, this report has national as well as local implications.

The report, which additionally focuses on policies toward food allergies, asthma, self-administration of inhalers and Epi-Pens, and annual medical information requests, found the nation’s third largest urban school district, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), to have health and wellness policies that go above and beyond Illinois state law. Amy Zimmerman, report co-author and longtime director of the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children commends CPS, noting, “Successful health and education outcomes go hand in hand. CPS demonstrates its commitment -- not only to child health and wellbeing - - but also to academic achievement by establishing these health policies that are in line with accepted best practices.” Ms. Zimmerman goes on to observe that charters which voluntarily adopted policies in line with CPS innovations have been offered support and resources from the district to implement, but “Even so, charters schools are unfortunately still not required to follow local school board health, safety,

and wellness policies. HB 1360 addresses this gaping loophole at both the local school district and state regulatory levels.”

Dr. Barbara Bayldon, a pediatrician at Lurie Children’s Hospital who is also president of the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a ‘physician champion’ of the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children, echoes the importance of consistent and high quality policies, “A typical doctor’s visit lasts 15 to 20 minutes. Children can be in school upwards of 35 hours or more per week. Lack of coordination on health and safety issues can interrupt learning and threaten child wellbeing. Even schools that do not need to abide by the same academic or operating regulations should be expected to provide the same level of health and safety standards.”

Concludes report co-author Amanda Kim, an attorney volunteering with the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children who plans to enter medical school this fall, “Options can be good. But should children’s health and safety be optional? We don’t think so.”

#####

The Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children is a legal care project of AIDS Legal Council of Chicago which uses the power of the law to secure health, dignity and opportunity for adults, children and families challenged by poverty, disability, and chronic health conditions. This innovative venture joins medical care, social support services, and legal assistance in partnership with major children’s hospitals and clinics throughout Chicago to reduce health and education disparities.

www.aidslegal.com/cmlpc