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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Linden Mayor Derek Armstead Calls on Residents, School Board Members, County and State Officials to Condemn and Reverse Linden Board of Education Superintendent Danny Robertozzi Decision to Discontinue Allowing Voting in Linden Public Schools on Primary Election Days.

Linden Board of Education Member Greg Martucci Denounces Linden School Superintendent Danny Robertozzi Move to Terminate Voting in Linden Public Schools without Full Board Approval

LINDEN, NJ, AUGUST 7, 2018 -- Mayor Armstead is calling on city residents, school board members, county and state officials to condemn and reverse Linden Superintendent Danny Robertozzi's decision to terminate resident voting in Linden public school on primary election days

"Linden voters have voted at polling locations at our public schools for generations," said Mayor Armstead. "Now, in 2018, Linden Superintendent of Schools Danny Robertozzi and, I'm told without school board approval, has cited safety as an issue that demands terminating resident voting in our public schools. This is voter suppression disguised as a school safety issue. This is wrong. This is un-American, especially since the school board has put processes in place to address school safety issues on primary election days."

Mayor Armstead said that he could find no record of a vote by the Board of Education itself approving of this move. He said he has spoken to Board members Greg Martucci and Katarzyna Kozak and they said there was no vote.

Linden Board of Education Member Greg Martucci said, “To my knowledge there have been no complaints about the safety of our students and staff on primary election days. Safety on this day has NEVER been an issue. As a duly elected guardian of our schools, I am appalled that a baseless allegation has been asserted.

Martucci continues, “I have absolutely no evidence that at any time did any member of the public approach the Board of Education in person, through text, or snail mail that the safety of our students and staff was a concern. I am further dismayed that this is the second-time correspondence to the public has been released WITHOUT formal action by the Board of Education.”

Martucci added, “My vote is sacred; my responsibility to represent the students, staff, and residents of our community is paramount. I am deeply troubled when correspondence goes out under the auspices of the Board of Education and members are notified AFTER the release of such letters falsely indicating my approval.”

Schools are used as polling places in every other municipality in Union County, in across the United States. This is un-American. As Mayor of the City, whose three children attend our Linden Public Schools, I care as well about the safety of everyone; but I also have a responsibility to all the residents of Linden. To deny our neighbors, friends, seniors, our residents with disabilities, our taxpayers who pay school taxes year after year, the right to use our schools (Public buildings funded by their tax dollars) to simply exercise their right to vote when voting locations are an issue is wrong. If Dr. Robertozzi and the majority on the school board are afraid of the citizens of Linden who care enough to exercise their precious right to vote—our families, parents, friends, neighbors-- not strangers—then they should reconsider their positions as leaders in this city and go work in a community where they feel more comfortable with the people.

“Law enforcement in New Jersey is in the forefront of school safety. The Linden Police Department, the Union County Prosecutor’s Office, the State Attorney General would all be leading the way if there were a real safety issue here. Who did the Superintendent consult with before making this decision? As a community, we demand to know,” said Armstead.

Katarzyna Kozak stated that in my position as a board member, my primary obligation is to the students of our district. I take this responsibility very seriously and base my actions and vote to represent the students, the staff as well as the residents of our town.

Kozak said, “Superintendent Robertozzi sent communication to Union County Board of Elections and Linden City Clerk regarding Linden Board of Education’s request for change in polling sites due to issues of student safety and interruption of educational services. My concern lies when correspondences are sent without any formal action by the Board of Education and notified of it after it was released. This request was not approved by the Board and misleadingly indicates the board’s consent.”

Mayor Armstead said that safety issue is a “smokescreen”, and that the real motivation is voter suppression. “The Superintendent and the majority on the school board aren’t really concerned about who comes to vote; they just don’t like who the residents are voting for. This is about creating chaos and suppressing the turn-out in the June, 2019 primary, pure and simple. They were openly opposed to my re-election, are furious at the results and want to create confusion and chaos.

Councilwoman Lisa Ormon

1st Ward Councilwoman Lisa Ormon indicated that to change the polling sits impacts my ward in the most serious manner. My only two polling places are schools. There are a lot of seniors in my community who walk to vote. They have done this for years. This complicates the process, and will result in difficulty in exercising our right to vote.

The board of education has the ability to determine days kids will be in class. If safety is an issue, then it should be an IN-SERVICE day. The schools that are used can be confined to only having one entrance for voting. There are more serious safety concerns besides Election Day.

8th Ward Councilwoman Michele Yamakaitis stated that a move like this will only create chaos having one polling location for the 2018 General and then another for the June 2019 Primary especially for our seniors and residents with disabilities? An

easy solution for the Board of Education is to simply designate the June primary an in-service day and instead of two entrances, have one entrance per polling places.

Mayor Armstead also called on the Union County Democratic Organization, led by Senator Nicholas Scutari, to condemn this move and have it reversed. “The reality of Linden politics is that the majority on the school board is aligned with Senator Scutari; they are his people. Their campaigns are financed by the Linden and Union County Democratic Parties, both of which the Senator chairs. Either he is behind this cynical move, or one of his fiefdoms is out of control. But he can undo this with a phone call, and I strongly suggest that he do that right now.”

“I plan on meeting with our City attorneys to see how we can stop this move legally, and urge Governor Murphy and the Commissioner of Education to intervene” the Mayor said. He also said that he has begun a mobilization effort to oppose this move and get it reversed.

“We live in a time where some states and courts are making it harder and harder for our citizens to exercise their right to vote. I can assure the citizens of Linden that I will not rest until the Superintendent Robertozzi decision is reversed.” Armstead said.

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