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Via Email

Mrs. Lynnsey Gardner
WJXT Channel 4
4 Broadcast Place
Jacksonville, FL 32207
lgardner@wjxt.com

RE: Prospective story on Charlton County School District

Mrs. Gardner:

I am in receipt of your email dated April 17, 2018 requesting comment from me, Dr. John Lairsey, or Mr. Josh Popham regarding a prospective story you are working on regarding the Charlton County School District. As you know, I am the attorney who represents the school district. You may direct all future inquiries or requests for comment from Dr. Lairsey or Mr. Popham to me alone.

Your email requests “any comment about Mr. Popham’s outcome by your school district vs. Ms. Browns [sic]”. I cannot comment because I do not know what you mean by “Mr. Popham’s outcome by your school district.” If you restate the request perhaps I can comment further.

I will, however, provide comment on another issue raised by your email. Having reviewed Mr. Popham’s personnel file, you have read the letter Mr. Popham wrote to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (“the PSC”) on August 1, 2002. The PSC is the organization that issues teaching certificates to educators in Georgia. That letter accompanied Mr. Popham’s application to the PSC for his teaching certificate where he indicated that he had previously plead *nolo contendere* to a misdemeanor. The August 1st letter explains that the misdemeanor in question was DUI, and that he plead *nolo contendere* in Charlton County Juvenile Court. Because the case was properly handled in juvenile court, the record is sealed and does not appear on Mr. Popham’s criminal history in compliance with Georgia law. It is questionable whether or not Mr. Popham was required to disclose this incident on his application to the PSC. Mr. Popham decided to be honest and forthright, again accepting responsibility for his actions by disclosing the incident on his application to the PSC. The PSC, having received all the information regarding this incident that occurred seven years prior to his application, did not hesitate to issue Mr. Popham a teaching certificate.

You are attempting to make a connection between the incident involving Ms. Brown in August 2017 and the one involving Mr. Popham from 22 years ago. They are similar in that Mr. Popham was 17 years old in August 1995 and Ms. Brown was 17 years old in August 2017. That is where the similarities end. Mr. Popham made a poor decision 22 years ago which was in no way related to the school district. Importantly, Mr. Popham accepted responsibility and suffered

the consequences of his actions. In contrast, Ms. Brown was not a student when she came to the Charlton County High School campus, was asked to leave campus multiple times by a school administrator, several more times by a law enforcement officer, and then refuses to accept that there are consequences to her actions.

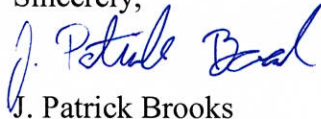
Campus safety is a paramount objective for each school in Charlton County, and the administration at each school is largely responsible for ensuring that safety. By now the tragedy of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida is well-known. Members of the public, including former students, have no business on campus unless they are there by invitation or for a valid reason and check-in with the school's office. Meeting with friends or visiting a sibling are not valid reasons to come to campus; those activities should be done before or after school and away from campus. The fact that Mr. Popham was not reacting to the tragedy in Parkland, but was proactively ensuring only those who should be on campus were there shows a level of responsibility and dedication the School District expects from its administrators. Indeed, Mr. Popham has been an exemplary administrator during his time as an assistant principal at Charlton County High School.

You have now referenced on multiple occasions other issues Ms. Brown had with Mr. Popham during her time as a student. The School District cannot comment on student disciplinary matters, and you have not communicated any actual example of another incident. However, if there are other disciplinary matters involving Ms. Brown that she and her family are unhappy about, that would be consistent with their apparent feeling that Ms. Brown should be able to do what she wants and live a consequence-free life.

The focus of this prospective story is becoming clear. I have not forgotten how you came to my office and falsely accused me of vandalizing the school, and now you are bringing up 22 year old juvenile court proceedings which are in no way related to this incident with Ms. Brown. If the focus of this story will be a smear campaign against employees of the School District without regard for the truth or consequences, it would unfortunately meet the definition of sensationalist, drive-by journalism. I hope that I am wrong in this regard.

Please let me know if you have other questions.

Sincerely,



J. Patrick Brooks

Cc: Dr. John Lairsey, Superintendent