DECLARATION OF LAKISHA YOUNG

I, Lakisha Young, declare as follows:

1. I have personal knowledge of the matters set forth in this declaration.

   I. Background

2. I am the co-founder and CEO of The Oakland REACH. I have served in this capacity since 2016.

3. Our members are a grassroots group of Black and Latinx parents and grandparents from low-income families. The Oakland REACH empowers parents to seek the best educational experience for their children.

4. When California began to shut down in March 2020, The Oakland REACH stepped up, as we always do for our parents. On March 24, 2020, we launched the REACH Relief Fund, which distributed almost $400,000 of funds to more than 1,100 families... twice. We also began exploring a more radical program to transform remote learning for underserved families, and to provide access to a quality education that was lacking even during in-person learning.

II. The Hub

5. In June 2020, we launched a citywide virtual hub (the “Hub”) to help parents strengthen their children’s learning and savvy during distance learning. The Hub is a family-focused, vibrant, and collaborative virtual community that integrates high-quality learning and support for the entire family. All participants live in low-income neighborhoods and their children are enrolled in low-performing schools. Over 92% of the Hub’s families qualify for free and reduced lunch. The Hub’s aim is to set a higher bar for research-based instructional practice, and to involve families with little or no history of observing their children at school, so they are empowered to be leaders in their children’s learning.

6. In its first phase, the Hub provided the families of 200 K-8 students with laptops and hotspots, as well as three sets of services: the Literacy Liberation
Center ("LLC") for K-12 students, National Summer School Initiative ("NSSI") for 3rd-8th grade students, and the Family Sustainability Center ("FSC"). The FSC provided families with socio-economic and academic workshops so that, despite the pandemic, they could thrive and not simply survive. Participants went through a needs assessment, partnered with a Family Liaison, and received individual guidance, seminars, and connections to needed services. In parallel, as part of the LLC, families and children participated in a regular schedule of classes, taught by skilled teachers, and had access to video lessons anytime. Families who successfully completed Phase I also received a stipend of up to $500/household.

7. Phase I of the Hub was a huge success. Attendance for students in kindergarten through second grade was 83%, compared to only 35% at Oakland Unified School District ("OUSD") during spring distance learning. 60% of the students in the REACH’s K-2 five-week summer literacy programming moved 2 or more levels on the district-wide reading assessment; 30% of students moved 3 or more levels.

8. The Hub’s second phase launched in fall 2020. Since then, we have employed 19 Family Liaisons to work through the Hub, more than double the number we hired over the summer, to support over 350 students and their parents. About half of our Family Liaisons are bilingual. Family Liaisons provide social, academic, and technical support so that the families can access and engage with their schools’ distance learning offerings.

9. Monday – Thursday between 3-5pm, we offer high-quality academic and social enrichment courses and tutoring in literacy, science, math, arts education, and more. We are also collecting real-time data about our families’ experiences with distance learning on a weekly basis, and offering afterschool synchronous academic and social enrichment programs.

III. The Digital Divide

10. Since the filing of this case, we have continued to provide a significant amount of resources to support families as they navigate remote learning.
students received school computers, we quickly realized that the devices alone were not enough. To this day, we are still showing parents how to use Zoom. The families we work with are not familiar with technology and get overwhelmed when their devices lag or start to malfunction in other ways. This is why we have continued to work with parents one-on-one so that they feel confident handling technology issues when they arise.

11. Parents across the state need access to similar, individualized support so that students do not miss out on any more instruction time. The state should provide IT support and have staff on call that can assist parents step by step, the same way we have been doing it. Without this individualized guidance, school computers simply are not enough to address the digital divide for families with the highest needs.

12. Additionally, school issued computers are not sufficient for students beyond middle school. School-issued computers are slow and unreliable. Students in higher grade levels cannot use these devices for more rigorous courses such as AP computer science or media arts and graphic design. Students from financially stable households have access to personal devices that many of our students do not. This digital divide requires that all students have access to the most adequate and reliable technology.

13. The parent leaders in our organization know firsthand the devastating impacts of COVID on children’s academic experiences. Their children rely tremendously on the supplementary resources at The Oakland REACH to fill in the gaps that their teachers cannot. Our parents themselves feel frustrated because many of them are not familiar with the digital world, and this has been a huge learning curve for them. When their children received school computers, no one thought about whether parents, grandparents, and other caretakers were familiar with technology or what being in charge of a child’s education at home would entail. Parents have to supervise multiple students of different ages and grade levels at once while at the same time adjusting to a digital world.
14. I know that for the families that do not have access to resources like The Oakland REACH, this means a tremendous learning loss for their children. Our students were already struggling even before the pandemic, but this situation has made things worse. We continue to support our families with after-school tutoring and enrichments and tutoring tailored to families schedules. UC Berkeley’s Lawrence Hall of Science, for example, has provided our students with hands-on science courses after school. The State needs to be thinking about how to address this learning loss now – not how it will address it eventually.

15. When we conducted a survey of our parent members in November, we found that many families did not want to return to in-person classes. One fear was the rising numbers of COVID in predominantly Black and Latinx communities. The other aspect is that parents like the support they are receiving at The REACH. We have been able to build and sustain trust with our families because everyone continues to work with a family liaison that helps them troubleshoot issues concerning remote learning. Parents never had this type of support prior to COVID. We also found that 14% of the families we work with responded that they feel distance learning was serving them better than traditional schooling. I know this is in part due to the consistent and individualized guidance they receive at The REACH.

16. Individualized support continues to be an important aspect of what makes our virtual hub so successful. Our parents feel less stressed and better equipped to engage with their children’s education. As a result, students also feel more support and reassured that that there is always someone ready to advocate on their behalf. The one positive impact of remote learning is that parents get a better chance of becoming involved with their children’s education, and we want to make sure that as many parents as possible have the tools necessary to do this.

IV. The Oakland REACH’s Platform

17. At the Oakland REACH, we have a four-point platform for building up technology infrastructure within families and closing the digital divide.
18. The first part of our strategy is hardware. Families need strong technology infrastructure, including devices for every child and multiple hotspots as backup connectivity for the household.

19. The second part is broadband internet access. Hotspots are not sufficient or reliable enough to guarantee that children have access to their virtual classrooms. Hotspots need to be considered as backup connectivity. Our families need broadband internet access to fully access learning for their children, and they will continue to need it after official school reopening.

20. Third, we need proactive family technology trainings to build power and agency with families in this area. We are in the process of surveying our families about how technology trainings can build their skills in becoming power agents in supporting their children’s education and just their overall life sustainability. Technology is our future and our families deserve to be in the game.

21. The last part of our strategy is tech support so that families have somewhere to go when they have issues with technology. This is essential during the pandemic so that our families can get back online when their devices or software are not functioning. Many families did not have computers and some no internet access as well. Integrating technology into homes requires a tech support infrastructure to help families troubleshoot issues. The Hub has successfully been providing tech support remotely to families all year.

V. School Reopening

22. This spring, we conducted a family survey to find out how our families are doing and what they need. From the survey, we learned that 50% of our families do not plan to send their kids back to school this school year. The other 50% prefer a model where kids are at school for full days, either a couple of times a week (a hybrid learning model) or all five days a week (a full return to the classroom). Parents do not want their children to go back to school if they are only there a couple hours a day for a few days a week—schedules like that are very disruptive and they don’t offer kids a meaningful amount of time in the classroom.
23. We are keeping these survey results in mind as we prepare for the summer and for the next academic year. 75% of our families said they would be signing up for our summer programming. Of these families, 85% said that they want to have their kids participate in outdoor activities. Based on that feedback, we are currently designing a summer program that is primarily virtual in academics but also has some outdoor activities. We are gearing up to serve up to 1,000 students this summer – that’s 800 more students than we served last summer! Our families have spoken; they want this and we are going to deliver. We are also working on a plan to expand the Hub model for the next academic year. If a significant portion of our families are not going to send their children back to school in-person, we want to be able to offer them a full-day program through the Hub.

24. With all of the attention on school reopening, I am concerned that the State is forgetting about families’ technology needs, which are still unmet and still important because families are choosing to keep their children at home. Some of the computers students received from their schools are getting older and need repairs. Many of our families still do not have broadband internet access. Although the State is also going to receive funds from the federal government to expand internet coverage, we are concerned that those funds will not be spent in a way that improves Wi-Fi service so that it meets families’ needs. And parents still need more help to learn how to use technology themselves: devices and connectivity are not enough if our families don’t know how to use them.

25. We are launching a technology fellowship this summer that will teach families computer skills and provide them with a new Chromebook. Over 100 of our families have signed up for the fellowship. We will have to fundraise in order to offer the program to so many families, but it will be worth it. Parents need their own devices and they need to be comfortable with technology so that they can engage in their own learning and work to sustain and support their families.
26. Through the Hub model, we’ve found a way to adapt the school system to the needs of our families. Our organization has moved mountains for Black and Latinx families, but the reality is that most students in our State do not have access to our programming and resources. That is why we believe that virtual programming like ours and our technology platform must be adopted and made accessible for all students throughout the State.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed in Oakland, California on 04/22/2021, 2021.

__________________________
Lakisha Young

LAKISHA YOUNG
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UPDATED - Declaration of Lakisha Young

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DECLARATION OF MARIANNA HERNANDEZ

I, MARIANNA HERNANDEZ, declare as follows:

1. I have personal knowledge of the matters set forth in this declaration.

II. Background

2. I am the Prevention Manager of Community Coalition ("CoCo"), organizational plaintiff for this action, and I have served in this capacity since 2019.

3. Founded in 1990, Community Coalition is a grassroots, community-based organization in South Los Angeles that strives to transform the social and economic conditions in South Los Angeles. CoCo works directly with people from the community to encourage civic engagement and to influence public policy. The vigilance and commitment of CoCo’s members, racial and social justice partners, and philanthropic supporters have sustained decades of community organizing, voter mobilization, and mass civic actions.

4. We work primarily with Black and Latinx people. Many of the families we work with are monolingual Spanish speaking immigrants. We know that there is widespread housing insecurity among our families, and some of our families experience homelessness. Our members have been some of the most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. The Impact of COVID-19

5. At CoCo, we knew that COVID-19 would have lasting impacts on our youth and families. Even before the pandemic, the students in our community did not have access to high quality education, and other basic needs like housing, healthy food options, parks, mental health services, and health care. As such, we offered a number of educational resources and services to our youth members. These resources included one-on-one academic counseling sessions, goal setting, college application workshops, essay writing assistance, academic tutors, college alumni panels, and college and career fairs.

________________________________________

DECLARATION OF MARIANNA HERNANDEZ
6. Since the pandemic began, we have significantly increased the amount of resources allocated to serve students and families as they navigate remote learning. In May and June 2020, CoCo conducted a needs assessment in response to COVID-19 and found that families did not have the technology or support necessary to access remote learning programs offered by their schools. According to a recent study by the University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education, 60% of South Los Angeles homes rely on mobile broadband. Another 17% of households in the area do not have internet access at all.

7. CoCo’s organizers have talked with students and parents every day since distance learning began. Through the needs assessment and conversations, CoCo learned that school districts were failing to provide parents with the information they needed to insure that their children had access to remote learning.

8. Not only did students have to adjust to not seeing their friends and teachers every day, but many also started taking on parental roles to help younger siblings with remote learning needs. Many of the parents we work with cannot afford to stay home because they work in low-wage, essential jobs. When these parents cannot stay home to support remote learning, older siblings set aside their own coursework to help younger ones flesh out technical and connectivity issues.

9. The families we work with only received one hotspot device from their schools, even those that have multiple students doing distance learning in the household. This means that there could be several students trying to connect to their online classes at once. A single hotspot device is not sufficient for this. Students need reliable connectivity as well as tech support so they can spend more time in class instead of trying to figure out technical issues. We have heard from students who have missed classes and who have been marked as absent even after several attempts to log in. Even when students can join a class meeting, they may be cut off or experience issues with audio because most of the Google Chromebooks they received from their schools are out dated and run slow systems.
10. Additionally, students are struggling with their socio-emotional wellbeing. Families need guidance to manage the emotional and psychological toll of COVID. Everyone that we have spoken with either has been sick with COVID themselves or has had someone in their family get sick. Some families have loved ones in the hospital or are in mourning. Our students are having to deal with this all while knowing that their parents, siblings, and other members of their households risk exposure every time they go to work. This is why schools should have tools and qualified personnel to address students’ mental health. Students can’t learn while they’re having to process all of these things with no support.

11. I have not heard of any students receiving direct support from their school for mental health counseling or guidance. One way to help struggling students right now would be to bring them together in small groups with safety guidelines in place. These groups could mimic the learning pods that we have heard about in wealthier areas. With all of their school campuses sitting empty, it seems like there should be enough space to allow students to come together in small groups, even if it were only for a short period once a week. Students have spent an entire year without any social and physical interactions with their friends, and many of them are showing signs of emotional distress and lack of motivation.

12. In December 2020, we met with parents to gather feedback about the resources we provided to help them with remote learning and the challenges that their students were still facing. The parents we spoke with shared ongoing frustrations concerning their children’s emotional regulation, stress management, hardware issues, and homeschool management. Parents were also frustrated because they were, and still are, dealing with a lot – homeschooling, COVID exposure, rent debt, food insecurity, and more. They all shared this sentiment of heaviness and were overwhelmed with the increasing number of COVID infections in their community.

13. Another thing that kept coming up during these discussions with parents were children in need of blue light glasses. Students are spending significantly more time in front of computers and tablets to complete coursework. Some students are even
suffering from headaches due to this prolonged screen time. We had one grandmother who took her grandchild to the doctor frequently because his vision was strained and he needed glasses. Yet many of our families cannot afford to purchase blue light glasses that would protect children’s eyes and vision. During our holiday toy giveaway, we heard from many parents that they would prefer getting blue light glasses instead of toys. One parent was so stressed about this that she was thinking of pulling her children out of school altogether.

14. Most of our funding comes from philanthropy or through grants that we apply to as part of our internal mutual aid support. Our limited budget does not allow us to provide devices, tech support, or blue light glasses for all the students that may need them. It is unfortunate that we are more than a year into distance learning and students everywhere still do not have all the tools necessary to learn effectively at home.

15. All of these stressors are especially concerning for high school seniors. A lot of students rely on individual support from academic counselors to navigate the college application process. However, many of our students have not been able to establish regular communication with their counselors and cannot ask them questions about college requirements or financial aid. As students receive acceptances from colleges and universities they need guidance on how to select the best option for them and how to pay for it. A lot of our students will be the first in their families to go to college so they cannot ask their parents or other family members for help. Our students need help understanding acceptance letters, financial aid packages, commuting options, etc.

III. CoCo Supports Remote Learning

16. Many things would help students right now. The digital divide continues to be an issue but is something that should have been resolved by now. This is one of the most pressing needs, and at the very minimum students need to be connected. Families with more than one child need more than one hotspot to support several video calls happening at once. If hotspots are insufficient, then families should receive free broadband internet.
17. Based on the results from our needs assessments from the summer of 2020, CoCo diverted significant organizational resources to counteract the State’s failures to deliver an education to students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

18. Staff and organizers purchased a total of 206 laptops, and also opened their offices to conduct in-person student meetings which required paying for additional cleaning, personal protective equipment, staff trainings on social distancing, and Lyft rides.

19. In July and August 2020, CoCo offered a virtual summer academic program for 100 students, grades 4-12 to target three areas of support: academics, technology, and wellness. The organization hired five trained and certified credentialed teachers, a team of tutors to provide individualized support for students, and an additional teacher to help students with special needs.

20. The program teachers taught students math and English lessons daily. CoCo’s summer program included individual meetings with students and families to support technology setup and troubleshooting. CoCo’s staff showed students how to use Google Classroom and taught parents how to use the platform Schoology to track their children’s academic progress.

21. The summer program also included a parent component offering weekly wellness support workshops led by licensed psychologists.

22. More recently, we identified partners in South Los Angeles offering in-person learning pods to address the learning loss due to school closures. We secured funding to provide our families with vouchers for these learning pods that they otherwise would not have access to. We are collaborating with YMCA-Crenshaw and Kumon centers to offer learning pod options to our families.

23. YMCA-Crenshaw welcomed CoCo’s families into its learning pods in February. The partnership launched on February 3, 2021, with the in-person access beginning on February 10, 2021. This learning pod addresses the need for a safe learning space, with in-person help during the day while parents work. This learning pod site also has 100 laptops on hand to provide for students who need them. Similarly,
Kumon offers in-person tutoring for students twice a week. Both of these programs follow COVID-19 safety protocols.

24. Based on the informal focus groups we held during December, we created a 5-week workshop series for parents. The workshops were led by myself, and our two Wellness Specialists who are also school psychologists. The workshops focused on topics concerning mental health, learning disabilities, stress management, and parent advocacy. We had over 130 parents attend the workshops regularly. This was the first time our programming reached such high attendance and engagement, which to me, only speaks to the need for these type of resources and services.

IV. School Reopening

25. LA Unified is now preparing to open early education centers and elementary schools in mid-April. Middle and high schools will be reopening by late April. While this is a good step forward, we want to ensure that parents feel ready and safe to send their children back. Students and parents can choose to remain online or participate in hybrid learning. Parents will also have the opportunity to update their selection every two weeks if they so choose.

26. With school reopening soon, at CoCo we worry about what this will look like for students that have fallen behind or remained largely absent throughout the past year due to competing priorities. We need schools to have well thought out processes and resources to meet each student where they are at in terms of academic and mental needs. The parents we work with would like to see smaller class sizes when students return so that teachers can better assess and support with learning loss. Parents are also worried that their students may not get the support they need to process the stress and trauma this pandemic has brought on.

27. For the students and parents that chose to remain online, we would like to see substantial investments to improve distance learning. Just as we have been providing them for the families we serve, all schools need increased support to provide more tutoring and counselors. We would also encourage all schools to implement targeted efforts to reengage students with chronic absences.
28. If our students do not receive the support they need, then they risk missing out on life-changing opportunities. The pandemic has already pushed many of them to find part-time jobs. At CoCo, we want our students to be successful and have a chance at pursuing a higher education and other opportunities that will give them access to a better future. Unless our education system develops a better way to support our high school seniors, many will lean towards working at the first job they can find so they can continue supporting their families during these times.

29. We know that COVID is going to have a lasting effect on every member of our community. That is why we are doing our best to help families get through these challenging times. But we cannot reach everyone that would benefit from our support. Even if everyone in the community was connected to us, we cannot provide the necessary tools and resources for them all. We simply do not have enough funding or the capacity to reach more families. We also work in other areas outside of education and, in fact, are not service providers. Yet we have been providing these services because we are filling the gaps exacerbated by COVID and that the state has failed to address in a way that is equitable. This is why our efforts should be implemented across the state – so that every single student in the state of California has a fair chance of getting through another school year and reaching their highest potential.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed in Los Angeles, California on _______________.

Marianna Hernandez

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MARIANNA HERNANDEZ

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DECLARATION OF MARIANNA HERNANDEZ
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