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July 22, 2019

Dear Parents:

As we approach a new school year, I am once again asking everyone (parents, guardians, schools, teachers, social workers) for their support and assistance in reducing truancy. For the last several years we have all made a concerted effort to reduce truancy and we are continuing to make progress. Your support and assistance in reducing the truancy rate was greatly appreciated. It was truly a team effort.

I believe all children deserve a solid education to prepare them for the challenges of today's world. Likewise, I firmly believe parents want their children to receive the best possible education. Unfortunately, truancy robs many children of their chance to obtain an education. If this letter does not pertain to you, I apologize. However, from my perspective the issue of truancy is important enough that I wanted to share with you some of my thoughts and concerns.

As the Wright County Attorney, I have supported open communication with our schools and have given many talks to various schools regarding the criminal justice system, the opportunities our great country offers, what it takes to be a good citizen and the need for an education. I also believe that to the best of our collective ability our children need to get an education without fearing drugs or violence. That is why I choose to sit on a number of Safe School Committees throughout the County. One of the issues raised in those committees is truancy. I have made the truancy issue a priority within my office. Ten years ago my office participated in creating a truancy program by collaborating with schools, Social Services, Court Services, and the Courts to assist families facing truancy issues. The goal of the truancy program is to help families facilitate successful completion of their children's education. The program is a success. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of all families referred to the program in the last three years have been able to correct the truancy problem before court involvement.

In the State of Minnesota, all children should attend school until the age of 18 and **must** attend school until the age of 17. Minn. Stat. §120A.22, Subd. 8. **Continuing Truant**...means a child who is under 17 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for three days if the child is in elementary school or for three or more class periods on three days if the child is in middle school, junior high or high school. Minn. Stat. §260A.02, Subd. 3. **Habitual Truant**...means a child under the age of 17 years who is absent from attendance at school without lawful excuse for seven school days if the child is in elementary school or for one or more class periods on seven school days if the child is in middle school, junior high or high school, or the above or the child is 17 years old and has not lawfully withdrawn from school. Minn. Stat. §260A.007, Subd. 19. Children who are truant can end up before a judge on a CHIPS (Children In Need Of Protection Or Services) Petition. It is the hope that through the truancy program families who have a concern over truancy can be provided help to address the problem before a petition is filed.

There are many reasons why a child does not attend school: illness, family emergency, mental health issues, funeral, religious holiday, bullying at school, parent forgot to wake their child, parent did not know school schedule, child missed the bus and there was no back-up plan for transportation, child overslept, law awareness of the importance of an education, child didn't feel like going to school, child was sleepy, child thinks school is boring, and the parents did not understand their child's school attendance policy. Some of the above reasons are considered lawful excuses but many of the above are considered unlawful excuses.

I urge you to contact your child's school if you have questions regarding the attendance policy. All schools welcome questions about their attendance policy and encourage parents to contact them if they have questions about a particular type of absence or if the school could assist you with why your child chooses to miss school. When you think about, the school wants what you want and that is a meaningful education for your child.

The following are some tips for improving school attendance:

- Make your children's education a family priority.
- Tell your children how important their education is to them and you.
- Insist that your children attend school and do their homework.
- Understand your children's school attendance policy.
- Make sure your children obey curfew laws and get plenty of sleep at night.
- Buy your children an alarm clock.
- Tell your children that you love them and give them hugs on a regular basis.
- Praise your children's effort that they put forth.
- If possible, help them with their homework if they request.
- Do not enable your children by calling the school to cover illegal absences.
- If your child does not want to attend school, find out why. Talk to your child and listen for an answer. If there is a problem, try to solve it together.
- If your child refuses to go to school, do not be afraid to ask for help. Talk to school staff to find out if your child has a problem and what resources are available to you.
- Advocate for your children in the school system.

Regular school attendance is one of the most reliable predictors of academic achievement. Research shows that children who do not attend school do not learn at the same rate as children who do attend school. Also, in law enforcement circles, truancy is widely regarded as a gateway to crime. Research confirms that missing school is a key factor in predicting future delinquency and criminal behavior. Keeping children in school does not only promote educational success, but is also a key crime prevention strategy.

Let us work together to reduce the truancy rate in Wright County. We owe it to our children. I ask for your help. I ask for your support. I thank you for your time and effort.

It is my sincere wish that your child's 2019-2020 school year is safe, productive and enjoyable. Have a great year!

Sincerely,



Thomas N. Kelly
Wright County Attorney