



Highline Public Schools Board Action Report

DATE: 6.27.23

FROM: Dr. Ivan Duran, Superintendent

LEAD STAFF: Holly Ferguson, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer

For Introduction: 7.12.23 For Action: 8.16.23

I. TITLE Authorization to join social media lawsuit

Select one: ☒ New Item ☐ Renewed Item ☐ Annual Item ☐ Revised Item

II. WHY BOARD ACTION IS NECESSARY

This motion authorizes the Superintendent to involve Highline in a multi-party lawsuit against social media companies such as Meta (Facebook) and Instagram; Board action is appropriate to ensure all parties are aware of this involvement.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since social media was created it has impacted schools; since the pandemic, which forced many students to spend considerably more time on their computers and phones, the degree of impact has gotten more severe. The negative impact on youth mental health has reached a point where even the United States Surgeon General has issued an Advisory (a formal document intended to call attention to an urgent public health issue) noting that while there are some benefits to social media, instances of depression, anxiety, body image and disordered eating behaviors, and poor sleep quality have all recently increased and are tied to social media use.

The lawsuit would have two goals: (1) injunctive relief requiring the social media companies to change how they design and operate their programs with respect to children; and (2) monetary compensation to provide the additional resources needed to meet the increased mental health needs of students due to the negative impacts of social media use.

There are no costs for joining this lawsuit; and costs incurred would come out of any settlement or judgement. The district is proposing to sign with local law firm Keller Rohrback, which is also representing other Washington state districts, including Seattle and Kent through this suit.

While the amount of funds the district might receive in a settlement or judgment is unknown, any fees we do receive would support alleviating the negative impacts caused by social media companies.

IV. RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move that the Highline School Board authorize the Superintendent or designee to sign the attached engagement letter from Keller Rohrback, adding Highline to the list of districts suing social media companies.

V. FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE

There is no cost for entering into this lawsuit; if it is successful we would expect to see some revenue, although the amount is unknown. The revenue source for this motion is N/A.

Expenditure: ☐ One-time ☐ Annual

VI. APPLICABLE POLICY(S)

This action is in compliance with the following:

N/A

VII. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is to not join this lawsuit, or to join a separate suit filed by a different firm. Not joining the lawsuit is not recommended, as social media is having a negative impact on our students and we need our voice heard on this topic. Joining another suit is also not recommended; the firm leading that case is not local, and would take substantially higher contingency fees out of any settlement than Keller Rohrback would.

VIII. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement Required: ☐ Yes ☒ No

IX. ATTACHMENTS

Keller Rohrback Engagement Letter

U.S. Surgeon General's 'Social Media and Youth Mental Health' Advisory

ATTORNEY ENGAGEMENT & CONTINGENCY FEE AGREEMENT

It is HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGED AND AGREED by and between Highline Public Schools (“Client”) and Keller Rohrback L.L.P. (“Attorneys”) as follows:

- 1. Employment.** Client hereby retains Attorneys to represent Client with respect to potential claims against social media companies. Attorneys will assist Client in gathering information and data relevant to Client’s potential claims. Attorneys will also advise Client with respect to those potential claims. At Client’s request, Attorneys will institute proceedings to seek remedies on Client’s behalf as Client and Attorneys conclude is appropriate and advisable (“the Lawsuit”).
- 2. Responsibility of Attorneys.** Although the individual attorneys listed below will be primarily responsible to represent Client in this matter, other members of Keller Rohrback may work on Client matters in accordance with their areas of practice. The primary attorneys representing Client are Cari Laufenberg, Dean Kawamoto, Derek Loeser, Garrett Heilman, and Chris Ryder. Client Attorneys will consult with Client in connection with any settlement proposal before accepting same.
- 3. Responsibility of Client.** Client will maintain control of the litigation. Client agrees to timely comply with Attorneys’ request. Client agrees to advise Attorneys of all facts, knowledge, or information relevant to Attorneys’ representation of Client, including facts, knowledge, or information which come to Client’s attention after execution of this Agreement.
- 4. Client Representative.** Client designates Holly Ferguson, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer, for the Client, to be the Client’s Representative. The Client’s Representative is responsible for receiving all communications from Attorneys and transmitting all communications from Client to Attorneys. Client agrees that Attorneys may rely on Client Representative’s statements as an accurate reflection of Client’s position and desires. Attorneys agree to keep the Client’s Representative informed of all significant developments regarding the representation.
- 5. Attorneys’ Fees.** Other than as set forth in Paragraph 8, below, the fees that Client agrees to pay Attorneys (“Attorneys’ Fee” or “Attorneys’ Fees”) will depend on the outcome of the Lawsuit, as set forth here:

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Keller Rohrback L.L.P.
1201 Third Avenue, Suite 3200
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 623-1900

- a. "Sums Recovered" means all monies (and the value of any other property) actually paid in settlement of or judgment on the Lawsuit's claims (including the settlement of any demand made by Attorneys on Client's behalf before initiation of the Lawsuit), including any monies paid in settlement or judgment as an award of attorneys' fees, costs, or interest.
- b. If the Sums Recovered is an amount less than or equal to \$10 million, the Attorneys' Fee shall be 15% of the recovery;
- c. If the Sums Recovered is an amount greater than \$10 million but less than or equal to \$20 million, the Attorneys' Fee shall equal the amount specified in Section 5(b) above, plus 13% of any Sums Recovered in the \$10 million to \$20 million range.
- d. If the Sums Recovered is an amount greater than \$20 million but less than or equal to \$25 million, the Attorneys' Fee shall equal the amount specified in Sections 5(b) and 5(c) above, plus 11% of any Sums Recovered in the \$20 million to \$25 million range.
- e. If the Sums Recovered is an amount in excess of \$25 million, the Attorneys' Fee shall equal the amount specified in Sections 5(b), 5(c), and 5(d) above, plus 9% of any Sums Recovered in excess of \$25 million.
- f. If the Lawsuit proceeds to trial, Attorneys will be entitled to an additional 2% of Sums Recovered specified in 5(a)-5(e).
- g. If the Lawsuit proceeds to trial and the court awards Client a monetary judgment and an attorneys' fee, and the attorneys' fee is greater than the percentage Attorneys would be entitled to under Section 5(a)-(f), then Attorneys will be entitled to the full attorneys' fee awarded by the Court.

NO ATTORNEYS' FEES SHALL BE PAID IF NO RECOVERY IS MADE.

6. Advice Concerning Attorneys' Fee. Client has been informed of the alternative of employing Attorneys on an hourly fee basis. This alternative would require the payment of a \$25,000 retainer at commencement of the representation, payment of costs as incurred, and payment of legal fees each

month for legal services. In deciding to engage Attorneys on a contingency fee basis, Client has considered the risks involved in this case, the experience and reputation of Attorneys, and the uncertainty regarding the number of hours required to prosecute the case.

- 7. Costs.** Attorneys will advance all “out-of-pocket” costs, fees, and expenses incurred by Attorneys in pursuing the Lawsuit (“Costs”). Notwithstanding the foregoing, Attorneys agree to notify and obtain Client’s consent before incurring Costs aggregating more than \$10,000 in any single month.

Client understands that Attorneys shall seek reimbursement from defendants for all Costs actually expended, but that there is no guarantee that Costs will be reimbursed by the defendants to Attorneys. Attorneys will be reimbursed for all Costs out of any settlement or recovery in addition to any Attorneys’ Fees they receive under Paragraphs 5 or 8, as the case may be. Attorneys shall be reimbursed for Costs first, from any monies paid by a defendant on account of Cost reimbursement and, if such monies are insufficient, from any monies paid as part of the Sums Recovered.

In the event of a successful recovery, Client may also be subject to a separate common benefit assessment ordered by the Court.

Attorneys may, with Client’s prior consent which shall not unreasonably be withheld, hire any expert or consultant whose services Attorneys advises Client is necessary for the evaluation or prosecution of any of the claims within the scope of the Lawsuit.

- 8. Withdrawal or Discharge.** Subject to Court rules and other applicable laws, Attorneys shall have the right to withdraw from representation of Client upon giving reasonable notice of the intention to withdraw. In the event of withdrawal of Attorneys or discharge of Attorneys by Client, Attorneys may seek reasonable fees for services rendered according to the terms of Paragraph 5, above. Client shall have the right to discharge Attorneys at any time. If Client discharges Attorneys, Attorneys retain the right to seek reasonable fees for services rendered according to the terms of Paragraph 5, above.

- 9. Venue and Attorneys’ Fees.** The Parties agree that in the event any dispute should arise with respect to this Agreement, venue shall lie in Burien, Washington. Further, the prevailing party in such an action shall be awarded reasonable costs and attorneys’ fees.

10. Outcome. Attorneys do not guarantee or represent a particular result in this Lawsuit. Client understands the risks associated with pursuing this Lawsuit.

11. No Other Agreements. Client has read this contract, has received a copy of it, and agrees to its terms and conditions. There are no oral or other agreements between Client and Attorneys. This Agreement when signed below by Client replaces any prior understandings or oral agreement between Client and Attorneys.

12. Governing Law. This Agreement and all aspects of the Parties' relationship shall be construed under the laws of the State of Washington, without regard to choice of law principles.

13. Other Provisions. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts and transmitted by mail, overnight delivery service, and/or email, each one of which shall constitute an original and all of which shall constitute one and the same document.

Holly Ferguson
Chief Policy & Strategy Officer, Highline Public Schools

DATED: _____

ACCEPTED: Keller Rohrback L.L.P.

DATED: _____

4864-0988-1452, v. 1

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