Civil Rights Groups Statement on Mystic Valley Regional Charter School’s Updated Hair and Make-Up Policy

The Mystic Valley Regional Charter School (MVRCS) recently released a new hair and make-up policy after receiving significant backlash against the previous one, including a letter outlining the ways in which the prior policy was discriminatory and in violation of both state and federal laws. The family of Mya and Deanna Cook, two Black Boston-area students who were repeatedly punished under the old policy for wearing their hair in braids with extensions, retained the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts (ACLUM) and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice (LCCR) and the law firm of Latham & Watkins as counsel. The organizations sent an additional letter to the school on July 25, 2017, demanding the school take six specific steps to remedy the harms suffered as a result of the previous policy. Today, the LDF, ACLUM and LCCR offered the following statement on the MVRCS’s new policy:

“We are pleased that Mystic Valley Regional Charter School has removed its ban on braids with hair extensions and hair more than two inches in thickness or height--rules that target characteristics common to Black hair. These changes are an important step forward for the Cook twins and the other youth who were willing to stand up publicly to see this policy eliminated. We hope these developments create a willingness among the school’s leadership to work directly with racially diverse and representative students and parents in developing its policies going forward.

“We remain concerned, however, about the broadly restrictive nature of the newly released hair and makeup policy. In particular, the new restrictions on hair adornments, head coverings and headbands are too vague and have the potential to be used discriminatorily and disrupt the learning process for girls at Mystic Valley.

“We await the results of Mystic Valley’s continued negotiations with the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office, whose advocacy we commend. We hope for an expeditious and thorough resolution of this matter so that all children can start the school year without any further disruption to their education. To that end, we seek to ensure that all students' disciplinary records related to the rescinded provisions of the policy are expunged and that school administrators and teachers receive diversity training. All of our children deserve to attend engaging schools that use discipline effectively. Sometimes the discipline can become the distraction. We hope this will no longer be the case at MVRCS.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.