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JEWISH COMMUNITY GROUPS MEET WITH DCPS LEADERSHIP AFTER REPORTS OF HOLOCAUST SIMULATION ACTIVITY AT WATKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

December 21, 2021 – Washington, D.C. -- Leaders of the JCRC of Greater Washington, the ADL Washington, D.C., and American Jewish Committee (AJC) met Monday evening with Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Chancellor of the DC Public Schools, and Rev. Thomas Bowen, Director of the Mayor's Office of Religious Affairs, to discuss the horrific incident at Watkins Elementary School involving a school librarian who allegedly instructed third grade students to reenact the elements of the Holocaust. Dr. Ferebee was joined by several members of DCPS' equity and elementary school management teams.

Our productive meeting included an open discussion of the significant pain, fear and outrage this antisemitic episode has triggered in our Jewish community and beyond. Dr. Ferebee and his colleagues reiterated their sadness at what transpired, apologized on behalf of DCPS, and detailed the extensive resources, including mental health services that they are deploying for all impacted stakeholders, which includes students and parents in the Watkins ES community. They emphasized that they are conducting a thorough and swift investigation into the librarian's conduct and will also review their internal employee screening procedures.

We greatly appreciate Dr. Ferebee's acknowledgement of the gravity of this situation and his sincere commitment to remedying the harm done -- in both the short and long term. DCPS families must be able to trust their school system to protect their children's well-being and to provide nurturing environments where students can learn and grow.

Our three Jewish agencies are committed to working with DCPS professionals in the days and weeks ahead to support the Watkins ES community and all school district students, families, and employees. We are providing age-appropriate educational resources, advising equity and curriculum staff, and counseling parents who are concerned about the impact this inappropriate episode has and will continue to have on their children.

On Wednesday evening, December 22, we will be convening a session for the Watkins ES community with professionals from the Jewish Social Services Agency to provide additional

mental health and spiritual support. And all three organizations continue to consult with DC elected officials to explore appropriate policy responses.

As antisemitism continues to escalate, our civic and community leaders must respond forcefully and effectively to counter hatred and bigotry with integrity and understanding. We thank our colleagues at DCPS for their commitment to partnering with us in this critical work.

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