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June 18, 2025

Dr. Kalanya Moore, School Board President
Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School Board
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Re: The Appointment of Mrs. Mary Smith Johnson as Superintendent of Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District; Resolution; Special-Call Meeting on June 18, 2025

Dear Dr. Moore and Attorney Simmons:

I write as the Attorney for Mrs. Mary Smith Johnson, and I represent her with regard to all matters concerning her appointment as Superintendent of Greenwood-Leflore Consolidated School District as well as any associated claims and actions related to certain defamatory statements made regarding her qualifications for the position. I am sending this correspondence in order to provide specific information that details how Mrs. Johnson is qualified to hold the position of Superintendent and to request that the Greenwood-Leflore County School Board ("GLCSD Board") pass a resolution confirming the vote on April 3, 2025, that appointed Mrs. Johnson to the position of Superintendent.

From the time that GLCSD Board received the letter dated June 6, 2025, from the Mississippi Department of Education ("MDE"), they have failed to take the proper action of thoroughly reviewing the facts and circumstances as outlined in the letter. Specifically, GLCSD Board failed to defend the action that it took (the vote to appoint Mrs. Johnson as Superintendent) even though said action was lawful and appropriate, and they failed to gather and submit to MDE the supporting documentation that would have dispelled the rumors and prevented the circulation of inaccurate

information that has only served to blemish the reputation of Mrs. Johnson and cause upheaval in the community regarding the stability of the Superintendent position. GLCSD Board owes Mrs. Johnson the duty of completing the task of appointing her as Superintendent by passing a resolution to that effect.

Please take note of the following:

1. There are two pathways to becoming Superintendent of a school district in the state of Mississippi – the Traditional Pathway and the Alternative Pathway. The Alternative Pathway is a process promulgated by MDE pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-13(3). The statute reads, in pertinent part, “(3) As an alternative to the qualifications prescribed in subsection (1) of this section, the State Board of Education is authorized and directed to issue regulations by January 1, 2018, which include minimum credentials, educational prerequisites, and relevant best practice experience requirements that will qualify a person to serve as a superintendent without having the direct experience or certification as an educator specified in subsection (1) of this section.” To be clear, Mrs. Johnson was and is qualified to serve as Superintendent under this provision of the law. This is the only provision of the law that should be consulted in this instance to establish her qualifications for the position.
2. The alternative qualifications adopted by the State Board of Education are: (1) hold at least a Master’s degree or higher from an institution of higher education that was accredited at the time the degree was conferred; and (2) have a minimum of six (6) years of documented successful leadership experience as determined and verified by the appointing local school board. Examples include, but are not limited to, for profit or not for profit organization, state agencies, business, industry, K-12 education – district level senior/executive leadership direct report to local superintendent of education, higher education or law, senior leadership position such as CEO, Commissioned Officers – Pay Grade 03 or above, and (3) obtain a position as district superintendent and submit local board resolution of appointment to that position. No other criteria, qualifications, or requirements have been set out by the State Board of Education besides those listed here and, therefore, no other criteria, qualifications, or requirements should be discussed or considered when determining whether Mrs. Johnson is qualified to be Superintendent via the Alternative Pathway.
3. Mrs. Johnson has met the alternative qualifications adopted by the State Board of Education as follows: (1) Mrs. Johnson has earned a Master’s Degree and a Specialist’s Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Mississippi in 2009; and (2) Mrs. Johnson has more than six (6) years of documented successful leadership experience which was easily verifiable by the Board because all of the experience exists on the Board-approved organizational charts attached hereto as exhibits. Specifically, Mrs. Johnson served in the position of Curriculum Instruction-Professional Learning (PL) in 2014-2015, and Elementary Curriculum and PL in 2015-2016, reporting directly to the Interim Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent as appointed by the Conservator of the District. Mrs. Johnson served as Curriculum Coordinator in 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019 for the Leflore County School District, reporting directly to the Superintendent. Mrs. Johnson also served as Curriculum Director in Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 academic school years, reporting directly to the Superintendent.

In addition, during this timeframe, she was also named Interim Superintendent in 2023 by the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District Board of Trustees. In addition to the six years of executive leadership experience in the field of education, Mrs. Johnson has leadership experience as the Pastor of Temple of Deliverance Full Gospel Church from 2006 – Present, and for the last four years she has been the CEO and founder of KMLCM, LLC. This represents an additional 19 years of leadership experience as a CEO/executive leader in other organizations.

“Successful leadership experience is to be determined and verified by the appointing local school board.” See *MDE’s Alternative Qualifications for District Superintendents Frequently Asked Questions, Question #3*. The candidate’s “six (6) years documented successful leadership experience shall be verified by the local school board of their designee and may include experience from more than one position.” *Id. See Question #5*. GLCSD Board has broad discretion and the authority to approve Mrs. Johnson experience as executive leadership experience that qualifies her for the position of Superintendent. GLCSD Board need only “determine” that the vastness of her experience qualifies as such. Seemingly, this experience is what was known and considered on April 3, 2025, when the Board voted to approve Mrs. Johnson as Superintendent. GLCSD Board has enough information herein to determine that Mrs. Johnson has the required six (6) years of executive leadership experience, thereby meeting the second requirement.

4. The second part of requirement #3 is the only missing requirement to effectuate its April 3, 2025, vote to appoint Mrs. Johnson as Superintendent. Mrs. Johnson as obtained the position of District Superintendent and now a resolution of appointment must be submitted to GLCSD Board. The resolution has been prepared and was submitted to the Board Attorney on Monday, June 16, 2025. Mrs. Johnson respectfully requests that the Board adopt the resolution as it is merely a technical requirement that evidences the outcome of the vote on April 3, 2025, to appoint Mrs. Johnson as Superintendent.

I would like to take this time to address certain issues as outlined in the letter from MDE dated June 6, 2025:

- MDE’s reference to Miss. Code Ann. §37-9-7 is of no consequence because Mrs. Johnson holds “a proper license as required by the State Board of Education.” Specifically, Mrs. Johnson has a “486 Career Level Administrator” license. She is scheduled to receive the “496” license as part of the Alternative Pathway post-appointment process. However, the 496 license is not required for the initial appointment to Superintendent using the Alternative Pathway.
- MDE’s reference to Miss. Code Ann. § 37-9-13(1)(a) and (c) was done in a manner that was misleading and disingenuous. Specifically, MDE laid out the specific criteria to be a superintendent using the Traditional Pathway and only made a one sentence reference to the Alternative Pathway which was the Pathway that Mrs. Johnson used to qualify for the position of superintendent. In so doing, MDE made it appear that Mrs. Johnson was not eligible for the position of superintendent because she did not meet the criteria stated in the paragraph when truly they listed criteria that were not applicable to the Alternative Pathway for eligibility.

- MDE's alleged concerns regarding the expenditure of funds based on Miss. Code Ann. § 37-61-19 is unjustified and without merit based on the information provided herein based on Mrs. Johnson's qualifications to be superintendent and the fact that her appointment was legally justified and proper.
- MDE's finding that there is no evidence to support that Mrs. Johnson is qualified for the superintendent position by the Alternative Pathway carries no weight in that MDE did not conduct an investigation or request any evidence from Mrs. Johnson before making that finding. It would also appear that GLCSD Board failed in this regard by not requesting and providing sufficient evidence to MDE to support their vote that appointed Mrs. Johnson as superintendent. MDE goes on to state that if GLCSD Board had reason to believe that Mrs. Johnson met the requirements of the Alternative Pathway, "the Board failed to adopt a formal resolution supporting Ms. Johnson's appointment and failed to request a nonrenewable, three-year license with a 496 endorsement." This constituted a failure on the part of GLCSD Board to ensure that Mrs. Johnson was eligible to serve as superintendent. The failure in this process belongs to GLCSD Board, not to Mrs. Johnson for it is the Board's responsibility to know its processes and to follow them.
- MDE's statement that they have "received complaints that Ms. Johnson may have falsified information on her resume by stating that she served as a Deputy Assistant Superintendent," was irresponsible, defamatory, and unsupported by any documentation supplied by MDE. Mrs. Johnson has never lied on her resume, and these alleged complaints should be tested in the light of day.

The GLCSD Board has a decision to make – and it is an easy one because the decision was already made on April 3, 2025. Simply put, GLCSD Board should sign the resolution that appoints Mrs. Johnson as superintendent. Any other action is contrary to the vote made by the GLCSD Board on April 3, 2025, and would be injurious to Mrs. Johnson, the Greenwood-Leflore County District and its students, as well as the community who has expressed support for Mrs. Johnson as she seeks to improve both the lives and quality of education for all students in the District. The way forward is with Mrs. Johnson leading the District, and the way to put this matter to rest and allow her to continue with her vision is to adopt the resolution that was presented to the Board.

I respectfully request that you review the information provided herein and attached hereto carefully as you make the important decision regarding the adoption of the resolution. At this time in the District, Mrs. Johnson is the leader who has the vision, experience, and support to improve things for the children and staff, and she should continue in her role as Superintendent. Thank you for your time and attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Nichon Mitchell, Attorney