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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

On Monday morning, I was stunned to hear that students at Bessemer City High School have been placed in a precarious position of losing practice time going forward to play football this upcoming season. I was further disturbed that such penalty was imposed by the AHSAA (Alabama High School Athletic Association) along with other sanctions, as result of imprudent decisions by the Bessemer City High School football coaches to conduct illegal football practice during the month of April in violation of rules set by the AHSAA.

Our children are being unjustly punished for actions of adult(s) to whom they hold in high regard for guidance and leadership. We cannot continue to allow systemic failure to befall students of the Bessemer City School system.

It is my opinion that steady dismantling of the football program is a tacit approach to supplying our students with directions to the prison pipeline and keys to prison doors rather than keys to success. Often times, football is the only factor that separate our students from criminal association. Due to low socio-economic resources that affect so many families, a child may use football as a means of escape rather than yielding to peer pressure in participation of committing crimes or other wrong-doing. Moreover, a football program may be the only means of obtaining a scholarship for college and ultimately a degree, thereby placing them on a pathway of success and accomplishment instead of self-destruction and failure.

Athletes involved in the football program at Bessemer City High School are currently facing challenges as a result of previous sanctions against them. The punishment of these youths by suspending, or penalizing their program effectuated by the actions of adults they have been instructed to listen to is non-conducive to the purpose of high school athletics. Further, penalizing these children who are already being penalized will detrimentally reduce funds allocated for school programs, lower school moral and may ultimately result in student transfer or drop-out. There have been studies proven to show that interscholastic sports involvement reduces disciplinary events at the high school level.

Specifically, the University of Michigan conducted a study in 2013 which concluded that when high schools have strong interscholastic sports participation rates, they report lower levels of major crime and fewer suspensions. The lead author of the study, Philip Veliz stated, "Sport participation opportunities within a school might operate to slow down or stop more major forms of delinquency within a school environment from occurring."

Bessemer City Schools is currently faced with issues of truancy and delinquency as are many schools, but we will continue to fight to invest in Bessemer City High School and its football program for which many of its players are dependent upon as the only path of opportunity to furthering their education.

The Jefferson County District Attorney's Office is committed to empowering our youth and providing them with measureable tools to build a brighter future.

Please feel free to contact me at (205) 497-8610, should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely

Lynneice O. Washington
District Attorney

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