

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 30, 2020**

**Contact: Casey Neal, [casey@plunkettnh.com](mailto:casey@plunkettnh.com)**

**Executive Council Candidate Leah Plunkett Calls on Sununu to Reconsider School Reopening, Sending Stories from Granite State Families**

**Concord, NH** -- Leah Plunkett, Democratic Candidate for Executive Council in District 2, gathered stories from Granite State families on how Governor Sununu and Commissioner Edelblut's school reopening guidelines will impact them in the fall. Today, Plunkett shared these stories with Governor Sununu and Commissioner Edelblut, urging them to reconsider their guidelines.

"We asked Granite Staters to share with us how the Sununu administration's 'flexible' approach to reopening will impact their children, households, health, and livelihoods. Families are scared, and frankly so am I. I work full-time, and so does my husband. We have two young kids (one in public school, the other due to start kindergarten there this fall) and, like all working families, we're struggling with what the safest thing is to do for our kids and household. It's almost August, and we don't know what back-to-school will look like." **said Plunkett.**

"Opening our schools in the fall without a clear, consistent, data-driven, fully-funded state-wide plan that puts public health first is irresponsible, dangerous, and puts countless lives at risk. We deserve better from our leaders than this half-baked approach that is turning up the heat on our families, educators, school staff, and school and school district leaders."

Read the full letter below.

**###**

Dear Governor Sununu and Commissioner Edelblut,

The guidelines you released on July 14 for reopening schools in the fall are reckless and will put countless lives at risk. Your "flexible" approach to reopening punts decisions on basic public health protections, like requiring masks, to the local level. There are many decisions that should belong to our school districts and schools, but life-saving safety measures in a global pandemic

do not. Here, “flexibility” and “local control” are code words for “irresponsible” and “state leaders dropping the ball.”

Your failure to show courageous leadership and take responsibility for our children puts parents and educators in an impossible situation that is going to end in lives lost, jobs lost, communities and neighborhoods pitted against each other and, quite simply, chaos for the Granite State. We deserve better from our leaders.

Executive Councilors have the honor of serving as advocates for the people. On the virtual campaign trail, we’ve gathered stories from your constituents to let you know how they feel about your failure to plan, and what your failure means for working families.

Here are some of the stories that we’ve heard, in your constituents’ own words. These stories show families’ confusion, frustration, and anxiety. They also show the resilience of Granite Staters. We hope you will read these, empathize with the communities you’re letting down, and replace your “guidelines” with a real plan that puts public health first, including masking and testing requirements for any in-person instruction, and fully funds the necessary measures to reopen our public schools safely and ethically.

“I am a licensed clinical social worker and a mom of a 4 year old immunocompromised organ transplant recipient. We have recently relocated to New Hampshire from a major city in hopes of reducing our child’s risk of exposure to Covid and to build on our child’s connection with nature. I am devastated by the recent announcements that do not mandate masks and proper social distancing in schools. Not only is this lack of leadership setting up the teachers to fail, it is discriminating against the immunocompromised children, many like my child, who COULD learn in person if masks were mandatory. Masks are proven to reduce transmission and to protect the vulnerable when all wear them. Those opting out of masks and social distancing should be the ones to participate in remote learning. We are well versed on the social emotional impact of isolation. We have lived it for the first two years of my child’s life. My child deserves a chance to learn in person. By not mandating safety precautions you have eliminated that right for my child.”



“This careless decision to reopen schools with “flexible” guidelines, no mask mandate, and a pathetic excuse for ‘social distancing’ not only puts the health of my child and my family at risk, but also the livelihood of our family. As an immunocompromised person, I’m not comfortable sending my child back to school. Which is great, because with your “flexible” guidelines, I can keep my child at home and continue remote learning. What I can’t do is work full time and manage my child’s education. One of them will have to go, and I can tell you it won’t be his education. It will be my income, and that means our household is going to look a lot different this fall and winter.”



“My husband and I are both teachers. Students in our school are not going to be required to wear masks in classrooms. We have to be in the building everyday. We have a child in middle

school and elementary school. We did not love remote as parents or teachers, but I am a Type 1 diabetic and in real fear for my exposure, my kid's exposure or my husband's exposure.”

●

“We feel safe in our kids' need to go back to school. I have seen one of my children blossom at school only to learn at home and dwindle. Both children are in desperate need of being with their friends and not with social distancing. They do not feel comfortable going back in any capacity less than what they left school. I do not think that going any less than five days a week to school is doing our children any favors, especially when I feel as a nation we are already far behind. If we cannot go Back the way we were, then I need something back from the high property taxes that I pay to provide this in another manner for my child.”

●

“Forcing families to make a decision like this is cruel, plain and simple. I don't feel comfortable sending my children back to school in person, but I can't afford to keep them at home. We shouldn't have to decide between their own safety and an adequate education. I'm outraged by the lack of leadership on this. No one should have to make this choice.”

●

“I have no story. I have no children in public schools, but I do have two grandkids in public schools. Sending children back to school in the fall is not only irresponsible when you consider its likelihood to spread COVID. Sending children back to school in the fall is going to result in trauma that these children will live with for the rest of their lives. Sununu, safety should be your priority.”

●

“Unfortunately, we are now, in late July, having this discussion on how school reopening will be structured with only a month or so before classes are set to start. This is because our elected leaders in Washington and Concord have dragged their heels and then completely abdicated their responsibility and finally chosen to ignore the preponderance of issues involved in effectively addressing this pandemic. They have allowed mixed messages and division to erode public trust. And once again, they have refused to acknowledge the much bigger societal issues our country and our state have been facing for many, many years, all of which are now being exacerbated by the current situation. They have essentially entirely sidestepped the issues they discount as unrelated to mitigating the effects of this pandemic and pushed for opening the economy and our schools. Will pushing these decisions down to the local level affect the Hollis/Brookline, Hanover or Bedford school districts in the same way as districts like Manchester, Nashua and Berlin? Absolutely not. Those well-to-do districts have much less diversity, disparity and poverty in their student body and are much more capable of affording the expensive solutions required to address all of it. Make no mistake these elected leaders are passing the buck down to the community level and tasking each of us, those much less able to make any systemic change or even afford the high costs required to mitigate any of these fractures in racial and economic disparity that have been left unaddressed in the United States for decades. A basic minimum income would help some parents remain home for more hours to at least attempt to assist their children with schoolwork and possibly address the needs for those who are food and/or housing insecure. Forgiving all small business loans and extending protections from evictions would decrease the impending tsunami of business bankruptcies and

homelessness. Family medical leave benefits would minimize local costs for the eventual quarantining that will be mandated for both teachers, parents and students when schools do open. And ensuring healthcare benefits for every American would better provide for universal testing and treatment. Listen, it could be minimized as simply rude for our society to have continually short-changed public education so that teachers have historically been stuck with the costs of adequately supplying their own classrooms, but forcing all educators and administrators into a situation where they must now decide whether to continue in their career and thereby potentially risk their health or life is simply unconscionable! Without any of those benefits in place, sadly the best we can hope for is that our local school district does what's best to mitigate the potential loss of life. If students, teachers and administrators are able to remain alive and healthy, then they at least have a shot at catching up on their teaching and learning. With a devastated population, what hope do we have of ever building any viable local or national economy? Maybe instead of focusing on academics, the best we can hope for during the year or two to come is addressing the precipitous decline in empathy in our country and focus on what it means to be an American and have true compassion for each and every one of our fellow citizens. We can only hope to get through this with the combined strength of everyone coming together to achieve a common goal: getting through this in the best possible shape we can. That should be our true measure of American Patriotism right now... United we stand, divided we fall."



"While this is new for everyone, it is irresponsible to reopen schools without a solid plan. Having a kid with special needs is already a challenge, it's even more worrisome to send them to school knowing they have difficulties understanding the rationale behind this pseudo social distancing. While I know my child will obtain more skills being in a classroom environment, it is worrisome for my child may be exposed to other students that may or may not have families that follow the same guidelines as my family has been doing since the pandemic started."



"Having an autoimmune disease makes me more susceptible to complications if I am exposed to COVID. If something were to come up other than the virus, seeking help could potentially make it worse because then it could then come down to me risking the exposure or staying home and not getting the help I need. Being a teacher, this is already a very stressful situation because if I were to get sick, who would replace me for the weeks that I am out at school? It would all just go back to square one for each student too because the exposure could have come from me or one of them."



"Seeing what other states have done, this is out of the ordinary. Other states have just stayed online- while not ideal, it is the safest option. As a parent I have always been told that the schools main priority is to keep our kids safe and this is the exact opposite. Masks have proven to help keep the exposure down. Students complain that they don't feel like they get the full benefit, but this is hard enough as it is. My child is my top priority and it should be the Governor's top priority as well."



“Being a teacher with a child during this time is harder than I expected. If I have to go back to school, but don’t want to send my kids to school, then who will watch them? Who will facilitate their online learning? My choice to not send my kid back to school is to keep them as safe as possible. I don’t want to be exposed and then bring the virus home and expose my family. It’s a sticky situation, and it’s not the right one.”



“While I am not personally affected by this, I see everyone’s perspective. While it’s important for kids to be in school, it’s irresponsible for someone with this much power and leadership to make a decision and give so little guidance.. This is a GLOBAL PANDEMIC, not something to take lightly. We should be able to look to Sununu for leadership in these unprecedented times and the fact that we are going into the school year kind of blind sided is unacceptable.”



“Businesses were quickly closed and the students were taken out of school as soon as the state realized how quickly this virus was spreading. While there weren’t many cases to start, the kids were taken out of school for cautionary reasons. It doesn’t make sense to send them back as the virus persists and we SHOULD be preparing for a second wave. Taking the kids out was the smart thing to do, but throwing them back into a potentially dangerous environment is irresponsible.”



“My kids will not be going back to school this year. As a parent my job is to do what I think is in their best interest. My goal is to keep them as safe as possible and with the current “guidelines”, which are flimsy and unenforceable, I don’t think it is a safe option for our family.”



“As a state, we need to keep our numbers down. If students and teachers decide to go back to school we will quickly see an increase in positive tests. This would mean that we are going in the opposite direction that we want. While we may not be a high-risk state we quickly could become one. We want to fight this virus head on and we have to find ways to do that, but not by sending our kids back to school. What kind of parent would I be if I sent my kid into a dangerous and unpredictable environment that these guidelines set us up for? This approach is messy, confusing and will put our entire state in danger.”



“My parents live with me and they have underlying health issues. We have done everything that we can to avoid exposure. Sending my kids back to school would put us back to square one. If they were exposed and came home and exposed it to my parents it would be a life or death situation. Keeping up with school while being as cautious as possible is too difficult. When we took them out of school a few months ago I knew I could keep them safe and help them when needed with their school work. If they go back and get sick then they are missing out on so much learning time. Keeping the kids at home is that smartest thing to do knowing they won’t be exposed, but still getting their education?”



“We still don’t know a lot about this virus and we’re learning more everyday. We should start thinking about a second wave in the fall, and the fact that we will likely have to take kids out of school again. It’s too much stress and uncertainty to place on your constituents with these weak

guidelines. You are a leader, and people look to you for what to do in these hectic times, how can you expect people to be okay with this decision?"