

**AN OPEN LETTER TO JUDGE STEVEN RHODES,  
LAST EMERGENCY MANAGER OF DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DPS)**

Judge Rhodes:

On Tuesday, May 10, 2016, you will hold the one public meeting required by Governor Snyder's "emergency management" statute. This is an inadequate forum for any meaningful standards of democracy, transparency, accountability and public input at a time of crisis. It speaks directly to the fatal flaws of "emergency management", and of your illegitimacy.

Eloquent and informed commentators from [our community](#)<sup>i</sup>, and from the [national human rights movement](#)<sup>ii</sup>, have summarized the key issues facing DPS today under your fundamentally lawless and white supremacist power grab. More broadly, we have recently published "[Detroit 2016](#)"<sup>iii</sup> linking Detroit's struggles for racial and economic justice, including education, water, housing, development and democracy.

You cannot evade the basic contradiction in your role by preferring to change your title. We need an honest public discussion.

You freely admitted at the time of your appointment that you have no relevant experience or qualifications to run a public school district, or to run an education system. You have stated that you bring only one tool to this situation: the possibility of state appropriations; with this tool, you in effect seek to continue the state's racist policies of corporate child abuse that have destroyed public education in Detroit over the last 17 years.

**The very idea that a meaningful top-down "solution" can be imposed by the state is absurd. This state legislature will use any financial excuse to further attack our children and their teachers.**

**A real solution must, at an absolute minimum: 1) come from Detroiters; 2) emphasize education over finance; 3) embrace democracy; and 4) reject structural racism, which has contaminated both Detroit's bitter experiences with educational "reform", and the state's "emergency managed" debacles in predominantly African-American urban communities.**

Your role as presiding bankruptcy judge in Detroit's Chapter 9 case ratified the abuses of "emergency management", and eviscerated local government accountability. Now, in spite of your admitted lack of knowledge or experience, you come out of retirement to claim the role of education czar, providing cover for the state's failed policies.

Your current drive to impose a state- driven, top-down, designed-to-fail “solution” on Detroit destroys your credibility.

**Unless you change course immediately and use your “emergency management” powers to help facilitate community-driven, democratic and educationally sound solutions, you betray yourself and basic principles of justice you’re sworn to uphold. Your judicial robe cannot cover up these crimes against our children, our city and our hopes for the future.**

**-Detroiters Resisting Emergency Management (D-REM)  
May 9, 2016**



<http://www.d-rem.org/>

<sup>i</sup> Dianne Feeley and David Finkel, *“Destroying Detroit Schools”* (May 3, 2016): “The Detroit Public School system (DPS) has been under state control for 15 years, the last decade under the direction of a series of Emergency Managers. The result has been a staggering debt, now more than half a billion dollars, with a 50% decline in the number of students served. More students attend charter schools than the public system, but as there is no oversight over charters, poorly run schools continue year after year. Over the past decade 160 Detroit schools of various types have opened or closed. In some neighborhoods there is no public school, only charters or the Education Achievement Authority (EAA), the disastrously failing system set up by Governor Rick Snyder. Yet neither the Governor nor the legislature is willing to accept responsibility for the chaos, assume the debt, and return the public school system back to local control.”

<sup>ii</sup> Glen Ford, *“Detroit Teachers Strike Against Disaster Capitalism”* (May 4, 2016): “The whole concept of public school “debt” must be rejected. Public schools are not capitalist enterprises; they do not operate on a for-profit basis (unless they are charters), and are tied to state and federally imposed funding formulas that even elected school boards are helpless to alter, and which serve to reinforce huge disparities between white suburban and Black and brown urban districts. Black communities cannot be held responsible for the racist hysteria of white flight, which relentlessly down-sized Detroit and its school population, robbing the system of per-pupil funding while the proportion of neediest students steadily increased and the physical school structures deteriorated – leading to Black flight from the Detroit schools. Nor can these communities be blamed when legislatures dominated by hostile whites facilitate the spread of urban charter school enterprises that they would never tolerate in their own communities.”

<sup>iii</sup> **“The world moves when we all learn, wherever we come from, to question the systems of power, privilege and prejudice in which we are raised, and to consider how we might best lend our energies and resources to shift those systems, to make life fairer and freer for everyone....” - Laurie Penny, “It’s easy for rich kids to break the rules. But it’s not how the world changes”**