Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C.
Erie • Pittsburgh • Jamestown, NY
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Education & Schools

Attorneys at Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, P.C. provide comprehensive legal services to a wide range of educational organizations. We have extensive knowledge and experience in responding to legal issues facing educators, as well as in identifying emerging opportunities and challenges. We stay abreast of education-related developments and emphasize preventative legal strategies to minimize risk.

Governmental Practice

General

- Provide counsel on parliamentary procedure for public meetings
- Advise on charter school issues
- Advise on compliance with the Sunshine Act, Public Official and Employees Ethics Act, and Right-To-Know Law
- Advise on constitutional issues affecting public school students
- Oversee public bidding process
- Draft school board policies
- Advise on federal laws including No Child Left Behind Act, Children's Internet Protection Act, and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
- Review and prepare public contracts
- Counsel on student disciplinary matters and student due process rights
- Participate in student expulsion hearings
- Analyze and negotiate contract issues
- Counsel on environmental compliance and land use matters
- Advise on all matters of liability and immunity
- Counsel on school director issues such as vacancies and more

Special Education

- Advise school districts on compliance with state and federal special education law and regulations (IDEA and Section 504)

- Consult with administrators on school district legal responsibilities regarding Child Find, evaluations, IEP development, placement issues, FAPE, and LRE
- Represent districts in state administrative due process hearings
- Assist in responding to OCR complaint investigations and state Bureau of Special Education compliance investigations and appeals
- Represent districts and insurers in federal court actions under IDEA and Section 504 seeking compensatory and punitive damages and attorneys' fees
- Advise school districts on discipline of special education students

Public Finance & Bonds

- Serve as bond and underwriters' counsel
- Secure required approvals under the Local Government Unit Debt Act
- Document finance transaction for General Obligation Bonds, Revenue Bonds, and Tax and Revenue Anticipation Notes
- Provide opinions regarding the validity, security, tax-exempt, and tax credit status of bonds, notes, and leases
- Assist in reviewing official statements to ensure compliance with federal securities disclosure laws
- Monitor arbitrage regulations
- Advise public bodies on federal tax compliance issues

Labor & Employment

- Negotiate collective bargaining agreements
- Provide guidance on bargaining unit and union-related issues
- Represent in grievance processing, labor arbitration, and all types of matters before the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board
- Advise and counsel on all aspects of employment law, including the employee provisions of the School Code
- Represent in EEOC and PHRC discrimination claims, unemployment compensation, and OSHA matters, as well as before other administrative agencies
- Prepare employment-related documents and agreements
- Train and update management and supervisors on critical workplace issues
- Develop teacher and staff evaluation process
- Negotiate and prepare administrative contracts

Workers' Compensation

- Defend work injury claims
- Counsel on loss control and prevention

Bankruptcy & Creditors' Rights

- Obtain relief from stay regarding outstanding taxes and debts
- Collect outstanding taxes and debts
- Consult on collection practices

Real Estate

- Real estate acquisition

- Land use and zoning
- Sale of school buildings
- Project development
- Public and private financing
- Construction contracts
- Title insurance
- Condemnation of property for school use

Environmental Law

- Due diligence audits
- Environmental compliance
- Emergency planning & reporting

Intellectual Property & Technology

- Patents
- Trademarks
- Copyrights
- Technology
- Litigation

Litigation

- Defend liability, civil rights, discrimination, employee benefit, unfair labor practice, and whistleblower claims
- Defend and prosecute contract claims
- Provide representation in alternative dispute resolution, including arbitration and mediation
- Counsel on debarment of public contractors

Education & Schools Litigation - Representative Experience

- Obtained a favorable decision from the Erie County Court of Common Pleas on behalf of Erie's Public Schools regarding a medical office building's property value, resulting in increased property tax revenue for the district
- Successfully defended school district against claims related to consolidation plan. Following bench trial in the Warren County Court of Common Pleas, the Court dismissed the claims
- Obtained a favorable decision from the Commonwealth Court on behalf of a school district client, reversing a trial court decision in a tax assessment case involving commercial property valuation
- Obtained favorable decision from Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court for two school district clients, regarding mask mandates during COVID-19 pandemic – the first of its kind on this topic

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