

4400 Wood Valley Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27613

January 3, 2017

Via Email

WCPSS Board of Education  
Crossroads 1, 5625 Dillard Drive  
Cary, NC 27518  
district7vacancy@wcpss.net



To the Members of the Wake County Board of Education:

I am writing to ask you to appoint me to represent District 7 on the Wake County School Board. I am sorry that this vacancy exists because of the untimely death of Zora Felton, who taught my son social studies at Leesville Road High School and who was a wonderful teacher and dedicated and responsive school board member.

I am a parent of two children who have been educated in the Wake County public school system since 2004, except for an 18-month period when my family lived in Iredell County and my children attended public schools there. My youngest will graduate from Leesville Road High School in June. My children have both received an excellent education in our public schools, and I have been impressed and grateful to witness the hard work and dedication of so many teachers and school staff. This is an ideal time in my family and work life to demonstrate my deep commitment to public education by serving the residents of District 7.

As a resident of North Raleigh, I heard and understood the frustrations of some of my neighbors in years past related to frequent redistricting, long distances to their childrens' schools, and other issues. At the same time, I've become aware of the challenges for the schools presented by inadequate and shrinking resources. In order for public education to thrive, it is critical that community members know that their voices are heard and that their priorities are being considered by the school board and school administration.

I am an attorney licensed to practice in North Carolina since 1993. At present, I am the executive director of North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc., a non-profit law firm that contracts with the North Carolina Office of Indigent Defense Services to help it provide inmates with their constitutionally mandated right of access to the courts. In my current position, I have gained experience and developed skills that would make me an effective school board member. I've navigated a 33% budget cut, which required me to make difficult and painful decisions, and still maintained an effective organization. I understand the importance of being a responsible and transparent steward of taxpayer resources.

While I do not have a background in education, as an attorney, I am trained to absorb and analyze large amounts of complex information, as well as to recognize what I do not know and need to learn. My legal training will help me to be an effective advocate for our students, and for the needs of our school system.

As requested, the following outlines three strategies for advancing the board's strategic plan:

1. Community Engagement

A goal set forth in the strategic plan is "to foster shared responsibility for student success by building trust, collaboration, and engagement among staff, families and community partners."

While I am aware of the board advisory councils, I believe a board member could have more frequent and better publicized avenues of communication with their constituents to make it easier for working parents to participate and be heard about community needs and concerns. If selected to serve on the board, I would not only be responsive to my constituents, I would seek out opportunities to engage them. Not every decision made by the school board is popular with every constituent, particularly when limitations on resources may require difficult choices. However, communication about how decisions are made, and transparency by decisionmakers, are particularly important in creating trust.

Decisionmakers need to hear from and listen to people in the community; parents understand their family's needs and challenges and are a source of ideas and information. Successful community engagement is an absolute necessity in a political environment that favors vouchers, privatization, and charter schools. Citizens who feel that their voices are heard, and who are fully informed about decisions affecting their children, are more likely to support the schools and work to ensure that the school system has the resources it needs to succeed.

My husband and I both worked full-time while our children were in school. We did our best to manage two children, two jobs, school activities and projects, church activities, sports, medical and dental appointments, and cooking and housework. Time has always been at a premium. Attendance at school board meetings and PTA meetings was difficult or impossible. Now that our youngest will be heading off to college, I would like to spend the time that I did not have in years past to be a voice on the school board for working parents and to make it easier for those parents to be heard and to be engaged.

## 2. Learning and Teaching

The stated goal in the strategic plan is “to provide educators and students with the opportunity to participate in a relevant, rigorous, innovative, and comprehensive learning environment.”

As a board member, the most significant way that I could contribute to achieving this strategic goal is to work to ensure that educators have the resources that they need to create and foster these learning environments. I am the executive director of an organization that is much, much smaller than the Wake County Public School System. However, I understand budgeting. I have done a good job allocating scarce resources to where they will have the greatest impact. I’ve eliminated unnecessary spending. I have made painful decisions about firing staff because of lack of funds. I’ve evaluated the cost effectiveness of projects and strategies. These experiences will help me ask the right questions and offer guidance as a board member.

Further, I can use the advocacy skills I’ve developed over almost twenty-five years of practicing law to educate both the public and the County Commissioners about school system needs and necessary funding.

## 3. Achievement

The stated goal is “to increase proficiency and growth rates across all groups and eliminate predictability of achievement.”

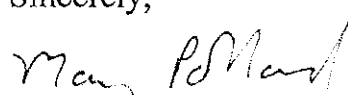
The most important thing that any board member can do is require accountability for goals and measures in order to assess program effectiveness and progress.

In order to advance this strategic goal, I will ask a lot of questions and review and seek data. How do we assess whether new skills are being taught successfully based on old style testing? What programs are in place to address the specific areas of achievement requiring significant improvement? When and how do we assess whether those programs are helping or need to be re-examined?

If chosen to serve on the school board, I would work hard to be the type of director that I value on the board of directors that governs my organization. I would be attentive, engaged, prepared, inquisitive, open-minded, fair, and hard-working. I would listen to all information presented, and would listen to and consider all points of view expressed by stakeholders in order to make the best decisions for our students.

Thank you for your consideration. It would be a great privilege to be selected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Pollard". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Mary Pollard

Mary Pollard  
4400 Wood Valley Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27613  
[mpollard@earthlink.net](mailto:mpollard@earthlink.net)  
919-673-7184

## **Experience**

### **Executive Director**

North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc., Raleigh NC  
January 2009 – present

Responsible for organization's achievement of its mission to provide constitutionally meaningful access to the courts for inmates in the custody of the North Carolina Division of Adult Correction. Manage twenty-eight employees, including fifteen attorneys. Responsible for allocation of and management of two million dollar budget. Work closely with attorneys in civil and post-conviction litigation matters. Engage in some direct representation of clients in post-conviction matters and federal civil rights litigation.

### **Staff Attorney**

Center for Death Penalty Litigation, Durham, NC  
February 2002-June 2007

Represented death-sentenced defendants in post-conviction proceedings in state and federal courts; represented several clients in trial proceedings subsequent to their convictions being vacated.

### **Attorney**

Womble Carlyle Sandridge and Rice, PLLC, Raleigh and Winston-Salem, NC  
September 1993-February 2002

Associate Attorney in Business Litigation and Products Liability. Handled civil litigation matters from inception through discovery and trial. Significant motion practice, some appellate practice. Worked on matters ranging from simple breach of contract cases to patent infringement matters to complex products liability cases.

## **Education**

### **J.D.**

Wake Forest University School of Law, Winston-Salem, NC

May 1993

Cum Laude; Recipient, I. Beverly Lake Award for Excellence in Constitutional Law; Law Review.

### **B.A. in Government and Foreign Affairs**

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

May 1985

## **Activities**

Vice President of Legal Affairs and Member, Board of Governors,  
North Carolina Advocates for Justice

## **Other Employment**

The Associated Press, New York, NY 1985-1990  
Manager, Administrative Services

## **References**

Available upon request.

January 3, 2017

Wake County Board of Education  
Crossroads 1, 5625 Dillard Drive  
Cary, NC 27518

To the Members of the Wake County Board of Education:

I am delighted to write a recommendation letter in support of Mary Pollard's request for appointment to represent District 7 on the Wake County School Board.

I first met Mary five years ago when our daughters were transferring from our base school to our magnet option, Ligon GT Magnet Middle School. I also know Mary professionally, as I work for the North Carolina State Bar, the governing agency for lawyers in our state. She is an evangelist for public schools.

Mary has both the experience and the temperament to serve on the School Board effectively. She understands, through personal experience, many of the issues that students and parents face regarding school assignment, transportation and magnet option decisions. In addition, Mary's work as executive director of a non-profit has given her knowledge and skill in strategic planning, budgeting and personnel issues. She maintained an effective organization, with strong leadership, through several administrative and financial challenges with consistent support from her board of directors.

Mary also has an exceptional ability to analyze information and make decisions without emotional attachment. She has a rare ability to be optimistic and kind while making difficult decisions that are in the best interest of the whole. Her temperament would serve not only the school board members, but also the Wake County District 7 constituents well.

As a lawyer, Mary is both an effective speaker and advocate. Mary will bring to the table a depth of knowledge about handling complex issues while adhering to the laws that govern the open meetings of public bodies in our state. Her extensive comprehension of the criminal justice system will also be valuable as the school board continues to provide guidance to schools about safety and how to handle juvenile criminal behavior.

In summary, Mary Pollard's experience as a citizen, parent, lawyer and successful non-profit administrator will enable her to serve District 7 with solid leadership, intelligence and critical thinking skills. Mary will contribute her time, energy and dedication to the Wake County School Board, assisting our current school board members as they continue to provide excellent guidance and leadership to our students, parents, teachers and administrators,

Please contact me directly if you need any additional information about my recommendation of Mary Pollard for this critical position. You can reach me at 919-210-9447 or via email at [dmullen@ncbar.gov](mailto:dmullen@ncbar.gov).

Sincerely,



Denise E. Mullen, M.Ed.

Bradley J. Bannon  
Burton Craige  
Narendra K. Ghosh  
Jonathan R. Harkavy  
Michael G. Okun  
Henry N. Patterson, Jr.  
Paul E. Smith

*Of Counsel:*  
Nahomi Harkavy

Patterson | Harkavy  
LLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Raleigh • Chapel Hill • Greensboro

January 3, 2017

Reply to Raleigh:

BRADLEY J. BANNON

bbannon@pathlaw.com

**Via Email**

WCPSS Board of Education  
Crossroads 1, 5625 Dillard Drive  
Cary, NC 27518  
district7vacancy@wcpss.net

Re: District 7 Board of Education Vacancy

Dear Wake County Board of Education Members:

My name is Brad Bannon, and I am writing to support Mary Pollard's appointment to the remainder of the District 7 term expiring in November 2018. I have been a resident of Wake County for nearly 20 years, and I have known Mary in various capacities for 14 of those years.

As a fellow lawyer, my first exposure to Mary was in early 2003, when I agreed to help her represent an indigent man who had been falsely accused and wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to die. Mary agreed to take his case pro bono and uncovered significant law enforcement and prosecutorial misconduct that led to the reopening of the case and the ultimate exoneration of the accused. To this day, I still aspire to meet the work and professional ethics she modeled in her handling of the extreme complexities of that case and advocacy effort.

In 2008, I became one of a new slate of members of the Board of Directors of North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services (PLS). I served as Board President from 2010 until July 2016 and will complete my Board service this summer. PLS is a nonprofit law firm under contract with the State to satisfy the State's constitutional duty to provide prison inmates with access to the courts. When I began my Board service, PLS was in difficult shape, still reeling from management decisions that saddled the budget with civil litigation settlement costs and weighed down the mission with low staff morale. I was part of a newly reconstituted Board tasked with identifying and hiring a new Executive Director to refocus and reinvigorate the organization. Mary was the best among many qualified applicants, and, since her hiring in January 2009, the Board's unanimous faith in her has consistently been rewarded. Not only did she revive PLS by making many difficult and ultimately successful management and budget decisions, but in 2013 she successfully navigated the greatest existential threat to its existence. The North Carolina Senate attempted to eliminate PLS that year, but under Mary's leadership, the organization successfully worked to convince legislators in both parties and chambers that it was the most effective--and *cost-effective*--way for the State to satisfy its constitutional responsibilities to the incarcerated. Mary also successfully navigated a 1/3 cut in the organization's already lean budget: another development that, I'm sure you all can appreciate, required extraordinary leadership and administrative skills.

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For the last decade, I've also served in leadership at the North Carolina Advocates for Justice (NCAJ)--a nonprofit, bipartisan organization of legal professionals dedicated to protecting people's rights. Distilled to its essence, NCAJ's mission is to even the playing field and fight for systemic fairness for people who face well-financed and powerful oppositional interests in the American justice system. Through my years on the Executive Committee and this year as President-Elect of NCAJ, I have seen Mary volunteer countless hours to that mission: not simply as a member but in a leadership role herself. She is currently Vice President of Legal Affairs for the organization.

Fortunately, Mary is also my friend, so I've seen firsthand her commitment to her family and community, as well as her work. I've also relied on her wisdom, judgment, and availability more than once in my own life when faced with serious personal questions and challenges.

The relevant sum of it all is this: Mary has a public servant's heart and drive, which she has consistently demonstrated over the 14 years I've known her. As importantly for the Wake County School Board and the children and families it serves, she has demonstrated her *effectiveness* as a public servant, managing multi-million-dollar state budget allotments, communicating effectively with legislators of all political persuasions, considering and balancing various stakeholder interests, and always keeping her finger on the pulse of her community.

I do not have children myself, but as a taxpayer and member of society, I believe deeply in the need for every child to have equal access to quality public education. While Mary has demonstrated interest in many public policy issues over the years I've known her, none has been more consistent--or, in my experience, more uniquely informed--than her interest in local public education.

I greatly appreciate your sacrifice and the service you all provide as my county's Board of Education, and I strongly urge you all to add Mary to your number. She will do you, the county, its children, and its families proud.

Sincerely,



Bradley Bannon

January 2, 2017

To the Members of the Wake County Board of Education:

As a parent of 4 children who have been educated in Wake County public schools, I am writing to share my wholehearted recommendation for Mary Pollard to serve as District 7 representative for the Wake County School Board.

I first met Mary when our daughters started in Girl Scouts together at age 5. We saw each other regularly at troop meetings, campouts, outings, and trips throughout their elementary school years. We had a collaborative troop, so each mother/daughter pair would often take the lead for a given badge or activity. During this time, I got to know Mary and her daughter Maggie very well. They were very active in the troop, and we shared many wonderful times together. Mary was a great role model for moms and girls alike, treating everyone with respect and kindness and pitching in wherever she was needed. I remember a time in particular when Mary really reached out to one mom who was having a tough time. Mary does not make a big show of it, but she does pay a lot of attention to how everyone is doing, and she reaches out even when it's easier not to. I have always felt that she has a very strong sense of justice and caring for others.

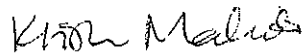
Mary and her family had a job-related move to the Charlotte area for a year and a half. We were so glad for the news when they announced they were returning to Raleigh! By this time, my daughter Maya and Mary's daughter Maggie were entering middle school and I started a mother-daughter book club that Mary and Maggie joined. We have 5 girl members who, along with their moms, have met monthly from that time until the present, rotating hosts and reading and discussing one book per month together.

It is impossible to provide a short summary of all the ups and downs that mothers and daughters go through together during the middle and high school years. What I can say is that over this time, the mothers have all confided in each other our hopes, frustrations, and joys, about everything we and our daughters are going through. While it's been a great experience to have a compelling book discussion each month, I almost prefer the "moms-only" talk we have at the beginnings of some of our meetings, where I can bring in my latest teen-age conundrum for advice. Whether it is something serious or just the latest goings-on in the school or community, I feel that Mary always has something thoughtful and informative to share. She clearly puts a lot of care into her own family, the clients she serves, and her community, and I feel fortunate to have had her as an enduring influence in Maya's and my lives. It is hard to believe that the girls are now in their senior year!

There have been other times when I have reached out to Mary for help in family matters. When my younger son had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade assignment to discuss our civic rights and responsibilities, we gave Mary a call and she listened patiently and coaxed him through it. When my nephew was considering going into law, Mary and Edward came over to dinner and provided some perspectives.

As a full-time project management professional, I appreciate the challenges in balancing family and career. My children are all in high school or older now, but there were times when I had them in 4 different Wake County schools at once. I admire Mary's steadfast dedication and involvement in her family and the community, and I would never hesitate to count on her compassion and wisdom in making the best decisions for the families in Wake County.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristin Mahato".

Kristin Mahato