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*Peter K. Ashton
One Olde Barn Way
Acton, MA 01720*

July 9, 2010

Acton Public School Committee
Acton Board of Selectmen

Dear School Committee and Selectmen:

I am writing to recommend that you appoint Jesse Liberty to the interim position on the School Committee to fill out the vacancy created by Jonathan Chinitz's resignation. I have reviewed the credentials of all of the applicants, and I believe that Jesse would be the best addition to the Committee at this point in time. There are several reasons why I recommend Jesse Liberty.

First, he has served as a member of both the School Committee and the Finance Committee and did an excellent job in both roles. In fact, I first got to know Jesse when we both were on the Finance Committee about fifteen years ago, working on the long range capital plan to deal with burgeoning school enrollment balanced with the needs at the municipal level. Jesse was instrumental in developing a "lexicon" that enabled all town leaders and citizens to have a balanced debate regarding the financial impact on various proposed capital projects including expansion at the elementary and regional schools. This tool proved to be an effective means to bring new understanding to both the capital and operating cost impacts of the proposed building projects.

Second, Jesse is extremely smart, and understands the financial, educational, and constituent aspects of the role of a School Committee person. As a member of the School Committee, he spent countless hours working with and listening to parents and non-parents alike, explaining the educational needs of our town and understanding the concerns of all. While a member of the School Committee, Jesse witnessed both good and difficult financial times, and can bring that experience and knowledge to the current difficult financial situation. Jesse is also a voracious reader (I know this from personal experience in discussing many books on economics that he reads and then discusses with me – who else would read books on economics!) Jesse reads about education (he has also taught in the past), and will bring that knowledge and insight to the position.

Third, Jesse is a strong advocate for the schools and understands the fundamental importance of maintaining a strong, sound public educational system in Acton. As a member of the School Committee he worked hard to find ways to improve our school system without creating an unnecessary financial burden on the taxpayers. For example, he was a strong advocate that we needed to rebuild the school's infrastructure at a time when state funding could be maximized to the town. In retrospect that proved to be the right decision, as we now see severely reduced levels of state funding for school building projects which has raised the cost to individual cities and towns. He also advocated for increased chapter 70 funding and worked effectively with our legislators in that regard.

Fourth, Jesse has a child entering Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in the fall and so he is connected to the schools not only an involved member of the community but also as a parent. I believe it is important for a school committee member to be involved in the schools as a parent to gain different, yet critically important insights into how the schools are operated.

Fifth, Jesse works well with others and has a proven track record working on various committees. He understands the importance of communication, collaboration, and listening to others, yet he is also not afraid to speak his own mind. He cares about the town, its future, and the critical importance that our public education system plays in that future.

Finally, Jesse is the only candidate who has done this job before, and therefore, can hit the ground running and be an effective member of the committee over the next nine months. You all have been new members to a committee at one point in time, and recognize that there is a learning curve to the job. Regardless of one's intelligence or experience, there is no substitute for "having been there before." Given the key decisions of both an educational and financial nature that the School Committee faces in the coming months, it is critical to have someone join the School Committee now who can jump in and make a difference immediately.

I recognize that this is a difficult decision and there are a number of well-qualified candidates. I hope you will see why it is in the town's best interest and more importantly the schools' best interest to select Jesse Liberty to fill the vacant school committee seat. Thank you for your service to the town and the taxpayers.

Very truly yours,

Peter K. Ashton

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