

January 30, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the U.S. Senate HELP Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned education, civil rights, disabilities, and community organizations, we write to reiterate our deep and continued concerns regarding the nomination of Ms. Betsy DeVos for U.S. Secretary of Education.

Ms. DeVos has experience as a major campaign contributor, soft money donor, and lobbyist, but lacks any experience germane to the work of administering the critical programs managed by the U.S. Department of Education. Ms. DeVos has used her considerable wealth to influence legislation and the outcomes of elections to advance policies that have undermined public education and proved harmful to many of our most vulnerable students, but lacks actual direct experience with education, instruction, and school system and program administration, as well as basic familiarity with key federal education programs and educational concepts. Unlike previous nominees, her significant lack of experience leaves her unfamiliar with the challenges and opportunities facing that nation's students, families, educators and schools.

Our concerns are beyond that of an earlier letter, deepened by what we saw unfold in the Senate HELP Committee confirmation hearing for Ms. DeVos. We remain committed to ensuring a high-quality candidate is confirmed for Secretary of Education but have yet to see our serious reservations addressed. More specifically:

- We urge the Senate HELP Committee to hold a follow up Q&A session with nominee DeVos. Beyond the previously raised concerns about the lack of finalized ethics paper work, the timeline for final vote on the nomination is arbitrarily limited. Precedent for the flow and timeline of a nominee confirmation hearing extends beyond the immediately preceding administration. The highly partisan split in opposing additional time for consideration of DeVos runs counter to the strong bipartisan efforts that had characterized the HELP Committee in 114th Congress. At the very least, we ask committee leadership to ensure that no final vote will be held until either Ms. DeVos is brought back before the committee for a follow up Q&A session OR Ms. DeVos provides written responses to questions submitted by committee members and committee members have adequate time to review and seek reasonable clarification.
- The Secretary of Education must affirm a commitment to ensuring equitable educational opportunity to all students, regardless of background.
- The Secretary of Education must affirm a commitment to focus on supporting and strengthening the nation's public schools and prioritizing work to ensure that a high-quality public school is a viable option for every child, in every community.
- The Secretary must affirm a commitment to ensuring that any entity receiving public dollars is held to the same accountability, transparency, and reporting requirements.
- The Secretary must be capable of and committed to the primary task of the role: implementation of federal education programs as intended by Congress.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to a continued dialogue related to the nomination of Ms. Betsy DeVos.

Sincerely,

Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators

American Civil Liberties Union

American Federation of Teachers

Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)

Americans for Financial Reform

Center for American Progress

Citizens for Effective Schools

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Directions for Youth & Families

Easterseals

Educators Rising

Equality Federation

Feminist Majority Foundation

Generation Progress

Hawaii Elementary and Middle Schools Administrators Association

Higher Ed, Not Debt

Indiana Association of School Principals

Kappa Delta Pi

Kentucky Association of Elementary School Principals/KASA

Know Your IX

League of United Latin American Citizens

Maryellen Armour, LICSW

Massachusetts Elementary School Principals' Association

Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association

National Alliance of Black School Educators

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National PTA
National Women's Law Center
Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals/NCSA
Oasis Youth Center
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals/CCOSA
PolicyLink
Rhode Island Association of School Principals
Sacramento LGBT Community Center
School Administrators Association of New York State
Secular Coalition for America
South Dakota Association of Elementary School Principals/SASD
TASH
Teach Plus
TESOL International Association
Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Association
The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Organizations
Utah Association of Elementary School Principals
Vermont Principals' Association
Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
West Virginia Association of Elementary and Middle School Principals
Wyoming Association of Elementary & Middle School Principals
Young Invincibles

CC: U.S. Senate