

January 30, 2017

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

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

Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

For us, the undersigned municipal officials from across the country, the vitality of our public schools is a critical cornerstone of our democracy.

We are members of Local Progress, a network of hundreds of local elected officials from around the country committed to a strong economy, equal justice, livable cities, and effective government. We are resolutely opposed to the nomination of Betsy DeVos to the position of U.S. Secretary of Education, the nation's top education official.

Based on her track record in politics and education policy, Betsy DeVos' confirmation would pose great harm to students in municipalities all across the country.

This position calls for someone with deep experience in and knowledge of public schools. DeVos has neither. She has never been a public school student, parent or educator, nor has she ever run a school system or a large organization. In her Senate confirmation hearings, she displayed a shocking lack of awareness of central issues in public education, including the civil rights of students with disabilities, measurements of progress, school safety, and accountability.

She also lacks solid footing when it comes to access to higher education, another critical concern for students. She was unwilling to commit to enforcing federal regulations to prevent fraud and abuse by career training programs that receive millions in federal aid but often don't prepare students adequately for gainful employment. She also said it would be "premature" to commit to enforcing federal regulations to prevent campus sexual assault.

DeVos does, however, have a track record of education advocacy, and it is a disturbing one. For years, she has devoted her efforts and her family's wealth to expensive lobbying campaigns that hurt public school districts and the millions of children they serve. Her goals: to privatize public education; to expand charter schools without accountability; to

lobby for voucher programs that divert public resources to private and religious institutions; and to eliminate the power of labor unions.

DeVos has been an unabashed cheerleader for the role of dark-money in politics. She has said of her donations that she has “decided...to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede the point. They are right. We do expect some things in return.”

DeVos’ focus on charter growth without regard to cost is financially reckless and economically unsustainable. DeVos’ attempts to support school voucher bills around the country would further deplete public education funding that is already grossly deficient in many states. Her inclination to divert federal funding from public schools toward unfettered charter and voucher growth would punish taxpayers and drive up taxes in municipalities.

As an educational leader, DeVos shows no interest in reining in even the worst offenders on the school privatization frontier, refusing to assure the public she would hold all low-performing schools equally accountable. This is not surprising given her efforts to block and undermine charter school accountability in a number of states across the country.

Throughout her Senate hearing, DeVos repeatedly declined to endorse existing laws and regulations that protect vulnerable students. Shockingly, DeVos refused to commit to enforce IDEA protections for all students with disabilities, regardless of the type of school they attend. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, is one of our nation’s central civil rights laws; it ensures that all children, regardless of disability, have full access to education. DeVos’ comments on IDEA protections demonstrated a lack of compassion and understanding of the federal role that, taken alone, should disqualify her from consideration.

We join with the broadening coalition of educational groups and civil rights organizations calling to stop this appointment. In the past few years, the federal government has effectively used its financial and regulatory power and its bully pulpit to challenge unfair disciplinary practices and advance educational equity. Putting the department’s funds, regulatory powers, and public position in the hands of Betsy DeVos would undermine important gains and endanger the education and well-being of millions of young people. Her belief that an unfettered marketplace should be the primary arbiter of schooling in America puts DeVos at odds with the federal government’s core responsibility to advance equity and root out discriminatory practices. Moreover, as municipal officials, we will be the ones left to pick up the pieces of DeVos’ lack of experience and neglect. We will deal with the higher taxes, unequal regulations, and children left behind in our nation’s schools due to DeVos’ abdication of federal responsibility.

Betsy DeVos' track record is one of failing to improve education for children while adding tremendous costs and harm to taxpayers. We are leaders who know the power of school transformation; we are parents and school board members whose towns and cities

are ready to build the schools we need. We urge all our U.S. senators to vigorously oppose the nomination of Betsy DeVos to be the United States Secretary of Education.

Signed,

Alex Pratt, School Committee Member (Littleton, MA)
Alexandra Gordon, Board of Education Trustee (Port Jefferson Station, NY)
Alicia Muñoz, Board Member (San Diego County Board of Education)
Amelia L. Peloquin, School Committee Member (Southbridge, MA)
Channel Powe, Governing Board Member (Phoenix, AZ)
Christopher Kolb, Board of Education Member (Louisville, KY)
Cindy Starks, School Committee Member (Arlington, MA)
Devin Del Palacio, Vice President, Tolleson Union School District (Avondale, AZ)
Diana Andrade, Board of Education Trustee (Medford, NY)
Dr. Sue Elhessen, School Board President (Bellflower, CA)
Ed Frank, School Board Member (Las Cruces, NM)
Francisco Tamayo, School Board Member (Chula Vista, CA)
Frank A. Tarantino, School Board Member (Sweetwater Dust/Chula Vista, CA)
Greg Maxie, School Board Member (Lovington, NM)
Gwen Jackson, Vice President, Board of Education (Hempstead, NY)
Jacqueline Doherty, School Committee Member (Lowell, MA)
Jaime McAllister-Grande, School Committee Member (Melrose, MA)
James W. Webster, Board of Education Member (Moab, UT)
Jarrett Behar, Board of Education Trustee (Commack, NY)
Jill Speering, Vice Chair, Board of Education (Nashville, TN)
Jodi Campagna, Board of Education Trustee (Plainview, NY)
Jonathan T. Wright, Vice President, School Board (Martinez, CA)
Joshua D. Amaral, School Committee Member (New Bedford, MA)
Joy Grayson, School Board Trustee (Greenville, SC)
Julie Keil Riordan, School Committee Member (Manchester, MA)
Kathy Rallings, School District Clerk (Carlsbad, CA)
Kathleen Harragan Polutchko, School Committee Member (Southborough, MA)
Katie Paetz, Governing School Board President (Phoenix, AZ)
Kelly Kent, Unified School District Governing Clerk (Culver City, CA)
Lacey Merica, School Board President (Omaha, NE)
Laura Often, School Committee Member (North Grafton, MA)
Laura Salomons, School Committee Member (Sharon, MA)
Lee Palemr, School Committee Representative (Somerville, MA)
Leigh A. Martin, School Committee Member (Mendon, MA)
Lisa Katz, School Board Member (Merrick, NY)
Lisa Willner, School Board Member (Louisville, KY)
Mandy Simpson, Vice Chair, School Board (Nampa, ID)
Mara Salcido-Alcantar, School Board Secretary (Lovington, NM)
Marc Terry, School Committee Member (Ashland, MA)
Margot DesJardins, School Committee Member (Westport, MA)
Maribel C. Toure, President, Board of Education (Hempstead, NY)

Mark Doyle, Vice President, Board of Education (Port Jefferson, NY)
Martha Morgan, School Committee Member (Rockport, MA)
Moira B. Kaleida, School Director (Pittsburgh, PA)
Mary Kathryn Prusnick, Board of Education Member (Schaumburg, IL)
Melissa Gates, Board of Education Trustee (North Woodmere, NY)
Michelle Bidin-Hettinger, Vice Chair, School Committee (Marlborough, MA)
Michelle M. Serafino, School Committee Member (West Springfield, MA)
Mike McGuinness, School Board Trustee (Pontiac, MI)
Monica Trejo, School Board Member (Tempe, AZ)
Nancy Farrell, Vice Chair, School Committee (West Springfield, MA)
Pamela Verity, School Board Trustee (Commack, NY)
Patrick W. Kelly, School Committee Member (Ayer, MA)
Paul Hessney, School Board Member (Olean, NY)
Paul Schlichtman, School Committee Member (Arlington, MA)
Penelope Blizzard-McGrath, School Board Trustee (Ridge, NY)
Robert J. Swatz, School Committee Member (Gardner, MA)
Ruscal Cayangyang, School Board Member (Vallejo, CA)
Ryan Ruelas, Trustee (Anaheim, CA)
Sara Wottawa, School Board Trustee (Farmingville, NY)
Shamann Walton, President, Board of Education (San Francisco, CA)
Shannon Scully, School Committee Member (Andover, MA)
Shanthi Gonzales, School Board Member (Oakland, CA)
Sharon Davis, Board of Education Member (Warwick, NY)
Stanford T Prescott, Governing Board Member (Phoenix, AZ)
Suzanne Wright, School Committee Member (Swampscott, MA)
T'wina Franklin, School Board Director (University Place, WA)
Tracy Zamek, School Board Trustee (Port Jefferson, NY)
Vickie Smith, School Board Member (Albany, NY)
Will Pinkston, School Board Member (Nashville, TN)