

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 17, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As members of the Congressional Tri-Caucus—composed of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus—we are dedicated to ensuring that all children, particularly children most at-risk in our society, such as children of color, low-income children, children with a disability, children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and children learning English, have access to a high quality education. A child’s educational opportunities should not be determined by their zip code, what language they speak at home, or the income of their parents. We are committed to advancing a nominee for the Secretary of Education who will continue the progress we have made to improve outcomes for these children and will enforce education and civil rights laws with fidelity. Unfortunately, Betsy DeVos is committed to moving us in the opposite direction.

Betsy DeVos is a billionaire who has spent her career advocating for the privatization of vital government services, which has adversely impacted the rights and opportunities of historically disadvantaged students and families. She advocates for moving taxpayer dollars away from public schools and toward unaccountable for-profit and non-public schools. DeVos was a key architect of Michigan’s 1993 charter school law, which allows almost anyone to open a charter school or run a failing school for years without providing any recourse for action.¹ In Michigan, where eight out of ten charter schools are for-profit,² the state’s irresponsible charter school law allows such schools to secure revenue, even while failing to serve children and families. Despite a clear mandate to improve this system, DeVos advocated against increasing accountability and

¹ Hall, Austin. “Issue Brief: President-elect Trump’s Education Secretary Selection.” *Washington Partners*, November 20, 2016, <http://wpllc.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/DeVos-Bio-Brief.pdf>; and Prothero, Arianna. “Betsy DeVos Helped Create Michigan’s Charter Sector. Here’s How it’s Doing.” *Education Week*, December 7, 2016, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2016/12/betsy_devos_helped_create_michigan_charter_sector_how_its_doing.html.

² Gross, Allie. “Did Michigan waste \$3.5 Million on Charter Schools with Questionable Futures?” *Detroit Metro Times*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/did-the-michigan-department-of-education-waste-35-million-on-charter-schools-with-questionable-futures/Content?oid=2381723>.

transparency for Michigan's failing charter school sector, even at the request of a broad, bipartisan coalition of community members.

DeVos's privatization agenda has been devastating for the people of Michigan, and particularly for children of color in urban areas like Detroit and Flint.³ Privatization of public education is a failed approach, allowing for-profit corporations to maximize value to shareholders rather than students. Introducing incentives to make money by exploiting the needs of poor students and families is a failing strategy that undermines core civil rights protections and jeopardizes educational opportunity for our most vulnerable children. The failure of privatization in Michigan is staggering—according to the National Assessment of Education Progress, Detroit is the lowest performing urban school system in the country.⁴ DeVos's advocacy for private school vouchers and for-profit charter schools has led to increased segregation within Detroit and across Michigan.⁵ Instead of using her fortune to support Detroit and Michigan public schools to provide an excellent education for all children, DeVos has worked to dismantle and defund already cash-strapped school districts to line the pockets of profit-seeking corporations. The ideology to which the nominee subscribes ultimately treats vulnerable children as a means to a profit-seeking end. This worldview is counter to the charge of the U.S. Department of Education and has no place in public education.

Additionally, DeVos has advocated against federal involvement in education. The Supreme Court case's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* affirmed that the federal government has a unique and important role to play in protecting and promoting civil rights and advancing an equitable education system and society. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is fundamentally a civil rights law, aimed at ensuring that every American child had access to a quality education and the American dream. Tri-Caucus Members were proud to play an important role in preserving the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's key guardrails for educational equity last year during negotiations leading to enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act. However, these guardrails are only as good as their implementation. It will be up to the new Secretary of Education to enforce these guardrails, and DeVos is clearly not up to this task.

³ Dawsey, Chastity Pratt and Ron French. "Betsy DeVos's Michigan Legacy." *Bridge Magazine*, December 6, 2016, <http://bridgemi.com/2016/12/betsy-devoss-michigan-legacy/>.

⁴ Lewis, Shawn D. "Detroit Worst in Math, Reading Scores among Big Cities." *The Detroit News*, October 28, 2015, <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2015/10/28/national-assessment-educational-progress-detroit-math-reading-results/74718372/>.

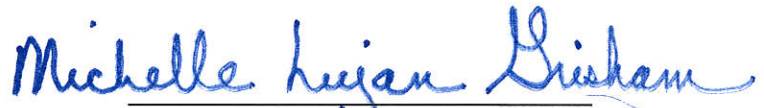
⁵ Wilkinson, Michael. "Betsy DeVos and the Segregation of School Choice." *Bridge Magazine*, November 29, 2016, <http://bridgemi.com/2016/11/betsy-devos-and-the-segregation-of-school-choice/>.

At a time in which children and families in our districts and across the country are concerned about their safety, their rights, and their opportunities, the last thing we need is a billionaire Secretary of Education with no experience in public schools who has worked to turn public education into a windfall for shareholders. We strongly urge the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to vote no on her nomination and instead confirm a Secretary of Education who champions civil rights protections and will advance the goal of quality education for each and every child.

Sincerely,



CEDRIC L. RICHMOND
Chair
Congressional Black Caucus
(CBC)



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
(CHC)



JUDY CHU
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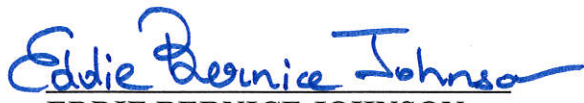
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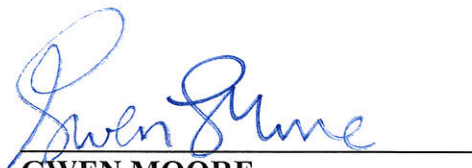
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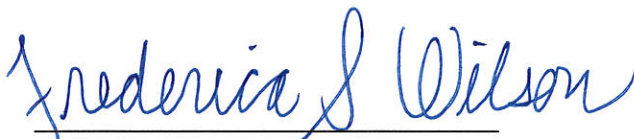
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ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS
Member of Congress



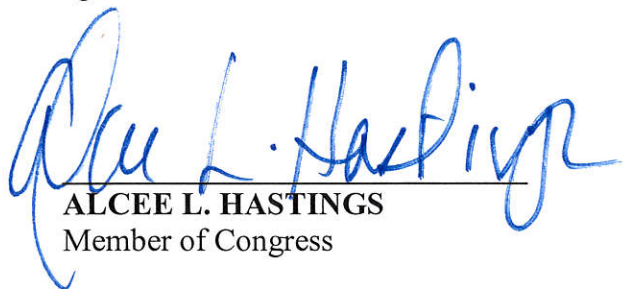
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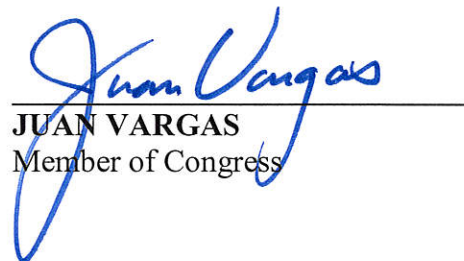
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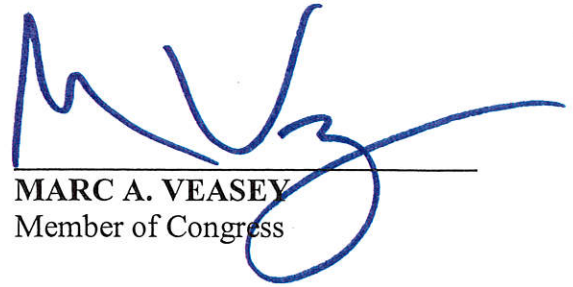
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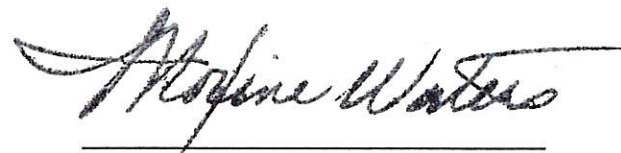
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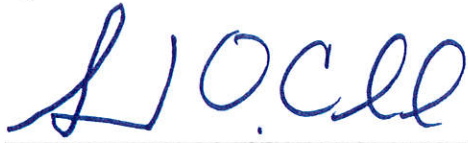
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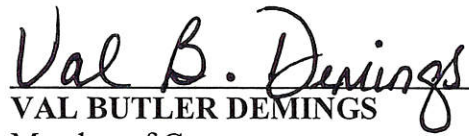
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