



January 9, 2017

**Officers**

**Chair**

Judith L. Lichtman  
National Partnership for  
Women & Families

**Vice Chairs**

Jacqueline Pata  
National Congress of American Indians  
Thomas A. Saenz  
Mexican American Legal  
Defense and Educational Fund

Hilary Shelton

NAACP

**Secretary**

Jo Ann Jenkins

AARP

**Treasurer**

Lee A. Saunders  
American Federation of State,  
County & Municipal Employees

**Board of Directors**

Helena Berger  
American Association of  
People with Disabilities

Cornell William Brooks

NAACP

Kristen Clarke

Lawyers' Committee for  
Civil Rights Under Law

Lily Eskelsen Garcia

National Education Association

Marcia D. Greenberger

National Women's Law Center

Chad Griffin

Human Rights Campaign

Wylecia Wiggs Harris

League of Women Voters of the  
United States

Mary Kay Henry

Service Employees International Union

Mark Hopkins

AAUW

Sherrilyn Ifill

NAACP Legal Defense and  
Educational Fund, Inc.

Michael B. Keegan

People for the American Way

Samer E. Khalaf

American-Arab  
Anti-Discrimination Committee

Marc Morial

National Urban League

Mee Moua

Asian Americans Advancing Justice |  
AAJC

Janet Murguía

National Council of La Raza

Debra Ness

National Partnership for  
Women & Families

Terry O'Neill

National Organization for Women

Rabbi Jonah Pesner

Religious Action Center  
Of Reform Judaism

Anthony Romero

American Civil Liberties Union

Shanna Smith

National Fair Housing Alliance

Richard L. Trumka

AFL-CIO

Randi Weingarten

American Federation of Teachers

Dennis Williams

International Union, UAW

William Yoshino

Japanese American Citizens League

**Policy and Enforcement  
Committee Chair**

Michael Lieberman

Anti-Defamation League

**President & CEO**

Wade J. Henderson

**Executive Vice President & COO**

Karen McGill Lawson

## Betsy DeVos is the Wrong Choice to Lead a Civil Rights Agency or American Public Education

Dear Senator,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations committed to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the confirmation of Betsy DeVos to be the next U.S. Secretary of Education. All parents and students in this country – a majority of whom are of color or are low-income<sup>i</sup> – want the best education, support and dignity for their own children. We stand with them and cannot support a nominee who has demonstrated that she seeks to undermine bedrock American principles of equal opportunity, nondiscrimination and public education itself.

DeVos argues her opposition to public education serves students, especially students who are the most vulnerable.<sup>ii</sup> We reject the notion that children are well served by the dismantling of a public school system that serves 90 percent of all American students<sup>iii</sup> or by the elimination of civil rights protections that require the federal government to intervene when students are discriminated against.<sup>iv</sup> The civil rights community has served as agitator and critic of schools and school systems that failed to meet the needs of students of color and low income students since long before Thurgood Marshall successfully argued the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Opportunity and achievement gaps that demonstrate longstanding bias against students of color, English learners, Native Americans, girls, students with disabilities, low-income students and other marginalized students are indefensible and unacceptable and we have fought at the federal, state, local and classroom level to ensure every student the quality education to which they are entitled by law and birth. Rather than joining with us in support of accountability, oversight and intervention, DeVos instead argues for an unaccountable education system which serves only to exacerbate inequality of opportunity.<sup>v</sup>

While parent frustration with schools failing to meet their child's need is real and parents have waited far too long for meaningful action by policymakers, the result of anti-public education agendas such as DeVos' has often, as in Louisiana<sup>vi</sup>, been worse outcomes for vulnerable students. The Michigan example, where DeVos' impact on education policy and the proliferation of unregulated and for-profit charter schools is considerable, demonstrates clearly that this agenda does not result in the improved outcomes students, parents and communities deserve.<sup>vii</sup>

Equal access to education is a cornerstone of the civil rights movement. The Secretary of Education's role as the enforcer of education and civil rights laws<sup>viii</sup> is central to advancing our shared vision of an inclusive and diverse system of high-quality public education that enables every student to live up to their potential. DeVos has demonstrated no previous commitment to ensuring equal educational opportunity in schools.

While she is entitled to her personal views as a private citizen, government officials are charged with enforcing our laws equally. DeVos' connections to anti-LGBTQ organizations including those that promote dangerous and discredited 'conversion therapy,'<sup>ix</sup> groups that seek to limit a woman's right to health care<sup>x</sup> and civil rights protections for survivors of violence,<sup>xi</sup> and her opposition to affirmative action policies<sup>xii</sup> demonstrate a lack of respect and appreciation for the diversity of our nation's classrooms and fail to recognize a long and pernicious history of discrimination against groups of students. While we have heard little of DeVos' record with regard to the rights and interests of English learners, immigrant students, students with disabilities and religious minorities, we are deeply troubled by the unacceptable rhetoric of the President-elect during his campaign and the absence of a record of DeVos' support for these students.

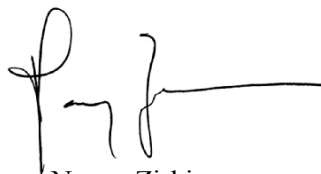
When compared with Secretaries of Education through the history of the department, DeVos' lack of experience stands out.<sup>xiii</sup> She has never been an educator or worked directly with children and families in public schools. She has never led a school, district or state agency tasked with educating students. She has never been a public school parent or a public school student. This lack of experience makes her uniquely unfamiliar with the challenges and opportunities facing the nation's students, families, educators and schools.

The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for implementing and enforcing laws protecting students from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex and disability and those laws that provide for educational opportunity from early childhood through graduate school. The person responsible for leading that department must absolutely be committed to respecting, valuing and protecting every single student in this country – without regard to LGBTQI status, family income, race, home language, gender, religion, disability or immigration status. Our nation's laws, economy, future and children deserve no less.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President

---

<sup>i</sup> See: <http://www.southerneducation.org/Our-Strategies/Research-and-Publications/New-Majority-Diverse-Majority-Report-Series/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now>

<sup>ii</sup> See: <http://www.federationforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Betsy-SXSWedu-speech-final-remarks.pdf?e40fe9>

<sup>iii</sup> See: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>

<sup>iv</sup> See:

[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.copaa.org/resource/resmgr/2016\\_Conference/COPAA\\_Voucher\\_paper\\_final\\_R6.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.copaa.org/resource/resmgr/2016_Conference/COPAA_Voucher_paper_final_R6.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> See: <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/betsy-devos-michigan-school-experiment-232399>

<sup>vi</sup> See: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21839>

<sup>vii</sup> See: <http://bridgemi.com/2016/12/betsy-devos-michigan-legacy/>

<sup>viii</sup> Department of Education Organization Act (Public Law 96-88)

---

<sup>ix</sup> See: <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/betsy-devos-education-secretary-civil-rights-gay-transgender-students-231837>

<sup>x</sup> See: <https://rewire.news/article/2016/03/21/devos-family-promoting-christian-orthodoxy-political-donations/>

<sup>xi</sup> See: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/28/betsy-devos-trumps-choice-education-secretary-has-unclear-higher-ed-priorities>

<sup>xii</sup> See: <http://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2016/3/1/school-choice-but-much-more-making-sense-of-devos-family-phi.html>

<sup>xiii</sup> See: [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/12/betsy\\_devos\\_would\\_be\\_first\\_ed\\_.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/12/betsy_devos_would_be_first_ed_.html)