

September 19, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

The undersigned national organizations—representing millions of parents, educators, administrators and school-employed mental health professionals and other organizations—are gravely concerned with the Department of Education’s reported plans to allow States and school districts to purchase firearms with Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) funds under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The intended purpose of this funding is to help schools provide students with important educational resources and ongoing direct services—such as comprehensive mental health programs, as well as drug, violence and bullying prevention programs—not the one-time purchase of firearms.

Our organizations have significant experience and understanding of best practices in creating safer school environments and we support the use of evidence-based research when making critical policy decisions. There is no conclusive research or proof to indicate that arming teachers will make schools safer. On the contrary, research does indicate that the over-hardening of schools diminishes school safety and has a negative impact on school climate.

The call for gun-free campuses has not only been echoed by millions of concerned parents and educators around the country, but by current law as well. In ESSA section 4102(5)(B), Congress defines the “Drug and Violence Prevention” program in Title IV-A as a program that seeks to establish “the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons.”¹ Additionally, the bipartisan Stop School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program which was included in the enacted FY18 omnibus appropriations bill ensures “no amounts provided as a grant under this part may be used for provision to any person of a firearm or training in the use of a firearm.”² This language clearly shows that the Administration’s proposal is counter to congressional intent.

Our organizations strongly oppose the use of Title IV-A funding to arm educators, and we call on the Department of Education to deny states and school districts the ability to use this funding to

¹ Elementary and Secondary Education Act, section 4102(5)(B)

² H.R. 1625 – Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

purchase firearms. We urge you to abandon this proposal immediately and clarify through guidance that Title IV-A funds should be used for their original intent, to provide students with direct and ongoing student support services, to promote a safe and healthy school climate and enhance student enrichment.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Counseling Association
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
ASCD
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Center for American Progress
Center for Health and Health Care in Schools
Columbia MD Chapter of the Links, Inc
Communities In Schools
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council for Exceptional Children
DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Democrats for Education Reform
Educators for Excellence
Futures Without Violence
Girl Scouts of the USA
GLSEN
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

National Disability Rights Network
National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV)
National Rural Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Science Teachers Association
National Summer Learning Association
Sandy Hook Promise
SHAPE America - Society of Health and Physical Educators
School Social Work Association of America
St. John's Baptist Church
Teach Plus
Ujima Inc: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community
Young Audiences, Inc.