



Equality California | eqca.org

January 16, 2017

To the Honorable Members of the United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Betsy DeVos, Nominee for Secretary of Education

Dear Senators,

Equality California believes that all students should be able to attend school in a safe learning environment free from discrimination, harassment and a lack of acceptance. Bullied LGBT students, particularly those who do not conform to traditional gender norms, are at high risk. They fall behind in school, drop out, and attempt suicide at far higher rates than their non-LGBT peers.

We are writing today to request that in Tuesday's confirmation hearing, as well as in one-on-one meetings with nominee Betsy DeVos, you probe where she stands on protecting LGBT students, access of transgender students to school programs and bathrooms consistent with their gender identity, and the application of Title IX to sexual assault in K-12 and on college campuses. It is crucial that the responses to the following questions be ascertained from nominee DeVos:

- Entities affiliated with the DeVos family have been significant contributors to organizations and candidates that have been hostile to LGBT equality and social justice and that have advocated for a harmful practice commonly known as "conversion therapy" that has been banned for children in California and elsewhere. Does she support the practice of conversion therapy? Can she explain whether she was involved in the decisions, and whether she supports the significant levels of financial contributions her family's foundation gives to the virulently anti-LGBT Family Research Council?
- Does she support full legal equality for LGBT people, including the federal Equality Act?
- Does she intend to follow existing Department of Education practice on protections for LGBT students?
- Title IX protects all students, including transgender and gender-nonconforming students, from sex discrimination. Although schools are legally required to treat students consistent with their gender identity and to allow them to fully participate in school activities and access facilities, in practice transgender students are often barred from using bathrooms that conform with their gender identity. Does nominee DeVos believe that that transgender students should be allowed to use bathrooms and participate in school programs and activities consistent with their gender identity?
- Does she believe the Department of Education should engage on so-called

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"bathroom bills" with the goal of assuring that students are able to utilize facilities and participate in programs consistent with their gender identity?

- Does she believe that Title IX has been correctly interpreted to protect people against sexual assault, regardless of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity? Does she think that college students should have the right to sue their colleges for failure to protect them against sexual violence (Clery Act)?
- Is she familiar with the work of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, and does she agree with its range of recommendations to combat sexual assault on K-12 and college campuses? Does she intend to promote the resources and prevent tools to colleges presidents and administrators, as well as campus and community law enforcement to keep students safe?

Equality California is making these requests because of the importance of ensuring vulnerable LGBT students, particularly those who are gender non-conforming, have safe learning environments, free of bullying, harassment and sexual assault.

Sincerely,



Rick Zbur
Executive Director
Equality California



Valerie Ploumpis
National Policy Director
Equality California

cc: Senator Diane Feinstein

cc: Senator Kamala Harris