

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As Co-Chairs of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus, we write to express our deep concern with President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for the Secretary of the United States Department of Education, Betsy DeVos. While Ms. DeVos' stances on a number of public education issues raise concerns, we cannot hold our silence regarding her opposition to the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.

Betsy DeVos' career has been marked by repeated attempts to undermine the rights of the LGBT community. She and her family have donated extensively to groups which promote the idea that students who identify as LGBT must undergo "conversion" therapy and have also affiliated with groups that oppose anti-bullying legislation. **The next Secretary of Education must represent all students in our country. Anyone who promotes such fervently anti-LGBT viewpoints is wholly unqualified to serve as the Secretary of Education.**

Since 1998, Betsy DeVos and her family's foundations have donated at least \$6.1 million to Focus on the Family, a right-wing organization which has spent millions of dollars attempting to defeat marriage equality amendments at the state level. Even more troubling, this organization supported by the DeVos family promotes "conversion therapy," opposes the right of LGBT parents to adopt children, and has referred to transgender individuals as "mentally ill." This organization has even gone so far to oppose anti-bullying policies and opposes basic workplace protections for LGBT individuals. The DeVos family's support for anti-LGBT groups and policies extends beyond just this organization to many other groups known for their anti-LGBT activities, such as:

- \$1,000,000 to the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, which has claimed that the overturning of the Defense of Marriage Act amounted to a "fatwa;"
- \$15,000 to the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which has opposed adoption with same-sex couples;

- \$433,750 to the Council for National Policy, a highly secretive group that is led by extremists like Focus on the Family's James Dobson among other extremists; and
- \$13,498,000 to the Heritage Foundation, which has stated that "Despite activist judges' opinions, the majority of Americans continue to affirm the reasonable conclusion that marriage is the union of one man and one woman."

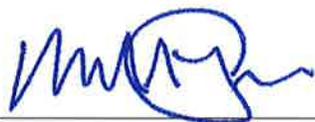
The DeVos family does not stop with contributions to intolerant organizations as they also support anti-LGBT politicians. For example, the DeVos family - including Ms. DeVos - were top contributors to Michigan State Representative Andrea LaFontaine, who sponsored legislation allowing adoption agencies to discriminate against LGBT parents and deny them the ability to adopt a child.

The LGBT community has made significant and long overdue advancements when it comes to equality in education. During President Obama's tenure in office, the Department of Education took important steps to combat bullying and ensure that Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, appropriately reflects the rights of transgender students. It is imperative that the rights of LGBT students are adequately protected moving forward.

As you move to consider the nomination of Betsy DeVos, we strongly encourage you to seek out answers regarding Ms. DeVos' stance on important education equity issues, including her views on protecting LGBT students from bullying and discrimination in K-12 and higher education spaces. We are particularly troubled by Betsy DeVos' past support for inhumane "conversion therapy" treatments and believe it is imperative that any Secretary of Education nominee denounce such practices before being confirmed.

As Members of the LGBT community, we know our schools must be a safe place for all children. As you consider the nomination of Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education, we strongly encourage you to stand up for the civil rights of LGBT students and ensure the next Secretary opposes any action to roll back our progress toward equality.

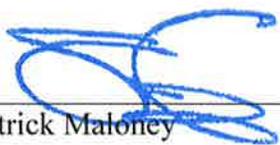
Sincerely,



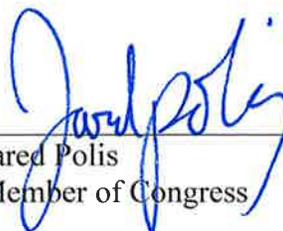
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



David Cicilline
Member of Congress



Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions