

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 30, 2018

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write to express our strong opposition to the Department's reported plans to allow States and school districts to purchase firearms or firearms training for teachers and other school staff with federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds.<sup>1</sup> This plan runs counter to the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and will make our schools more dangerous, and our students less safe. We urge you to abandon this proposal immediately, deny state and school district requests to use federal funds for this purpose, and instead work with us and other stakeholders to focus on other efforts that enhance student safety and prevent violence.

The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant program, authorized under Title IV-A of ESSA in 2015, provides funds to States and school districts for a range of activities intended to keep students safe and healthy, provide a well-rounded education, and help school districts more effectively use education technology. Congress never intended for these funds to be used to purchase weapons, or train teachers in how to use weapons in schools. In fact, Congress denounced the presence of firearms in schools in ESEA section 4102(5)(B), when it defined the term "drug and violence prevention" as a program that fosters "the creation and maintenance of a school environment free of weapons."<sup>2</sup>

Within the realm of education, it is the Federal government's longstanding position to prohibit federal funds from being used to purchase weapons. Just a few months ago, Congress reiterated that position with the bipartisan Stop School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training program, which ensures "No amounts provided as a grant under this part may be used for the provision to any person of a firearm or training in the use of a firearm."<sup>3</sup> According to the *New York Times*, your Department acknowledges that moving forward with this plan would be the first time a federal agency has authorized the purchase of weapons without Congressional mandate.<sup>4</sup> Establishing such a precedent would be dangerous and clearly against Congressional intent.

Educators already face the daunting task of educating our next generation. Teachers and other school staff should be focused on providing instruction, engaging families, and providing students with the skills and supports they need to succeed in the workforce and in life, not on managing and potentially responding to threats with deadly force. In fact, a recent poll showed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/23/us/politics/devos-guns-in-schools.html>

<sup>2</sup> Elementary and Secondary Education Act, section 4102(5)(B)

<sup>3</sup> H.R.1625 - Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/23/us/politics/devos-guns-in-schools.html>

students with the skills and supports they need to succeed in the workforce and in life, not on managing and potentially responding to threats with deadly force. In fact, a recent poll showed that the overwhelming majority of educators do not want to be armed, and instead many believe social emotional learning, mental health supports, and increased wraparound services and funding are a more effective way to keep students safe.<sup>5</sup>

Students across the country deserve to learn in an environment that is safe and free of weapons. Introducing more guns into schools and classrooms is likely to lead to more, not less, violence. Reports of an unintentional firing in a classroom<sup>6</sup> and even a gun being left in an elementary school bathroom<sup>7</sup> illustrate the very real dangers to our children of arming teachers and other school staff.

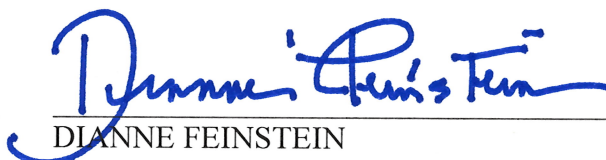
Title IV-A provides the opportunity for states and school districts to tailor their programming to local needs and improve school safety and student learning. The Administration's proposal to allow States and school districts to use federal ESEA funds to arm teachers and other school staff not only runs counter to Congressional intent and established federal precedent, but would take schools and communities backwards in pursuit of these goals. We urge you to disallow any State or local educational agency from using ESEA funds for these purchases and to work with Congress to ensure our students are healthy, safe, and well-supported.

Sincerely,



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PATTY MURRAY  
United States Senator



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DIANNE FEINSTEIN  
United States Senator



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BILL NELSON  
United States Senator



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CHARLES E. SCHUMER  
United States Senator

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<sup>5</sup> <https://teachplus.org/news-events/press-release/teachers-overwhelmingly-oppose-idea-arming-teachers-schools-new-national>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/03/14/teacher-accidentally-discharges-firearm-in-calif-classroom-he-was-trained-in-gun-use/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cops-teacher-left-gun-in-bathroom-elementary-kids-found-it/>





CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senator



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senator



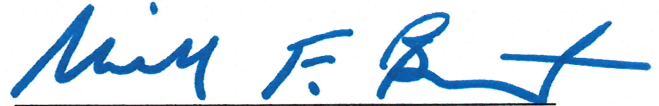
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United States Senator



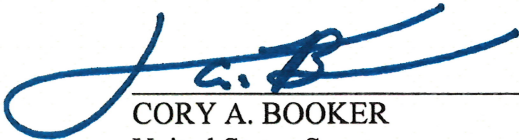
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United States Senator



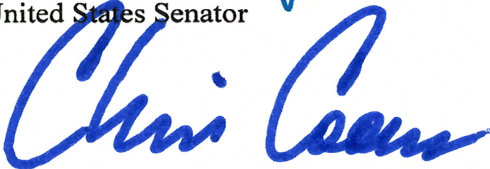
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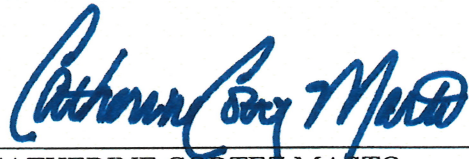
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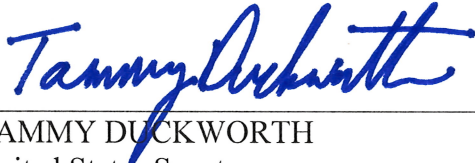
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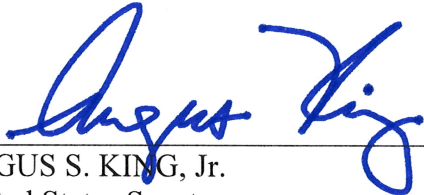
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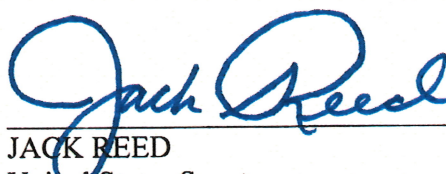


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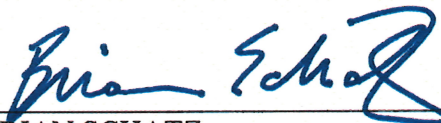
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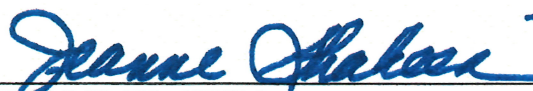
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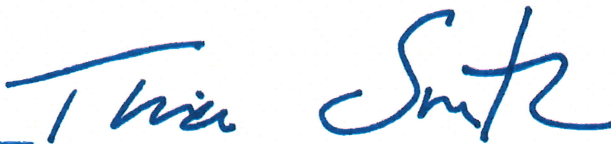
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BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator



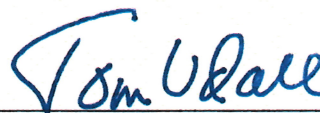
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