

Miller Place Union Free School District

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January 9, 2017

SENT VIA FAX - (202) 228-3027

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer,

We are writing to you today to voice our concerns regarding the possible confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of the United States Department of Education. Our concerns are twofold. The first reservation we have is regarding the candidate's lack of first-hand experience as an educator or administrator within the public school system. Since the majority of the children in the United States are currently being educated within the public school system, we feel that this experience is very important for an effective Secretary of Education. Upon reading Ms. DeVos' bio, it is clear that her experience with education is purely in the political realm - whether it be through her advocacy for school choice or her philanthropic initiatives. Her record also shows a clear bias towards private, parochial, and charter schools and the use of vouchers to attend these schools.

This bias leads us to our second overarching concern with Betsy DeVos as a candidate for Secretary of Education. The concern is that Betsy DeVos has been a strong advocate for the use of public funds to attend private schools through vouchers, and this would have a direct negative impact on our public school system's fiscal stability if it is put into effect on a national level. As school board trustees, we are charged with the task of creating a budget that balances the needs of our diverse student population, our teachers, administrators and staff, and provides the resources for a safe and stimulating learning environment for all students regardless of ability. We do all this while keeping within the property tax cap as prescribed by New York State law. As board members of a public school system, we do not choose which students to enroll, but are required to provide educational resources to all children living within our district. This indiscriminate access to education is an important difference between public and private/parochial schools.

In Miller Place we currently have 2 students attending a charter school and 84 students attending private or parochial schools. If each of these 84 students received a tuition voucher of say \$13,422, (which is the amount currently deducted for each charter student), and if these vouchers came from our state aid, it could mean a

reduction of \$1,127,448 in funding for our public schools. The voucher concept that Betsy DeVos has advocated in her own state of Michigan uses public funds to pay for private schools, thus diverting funding from public schools, and negatively impacting their ability to maintain instructional and non-instructional programs. Since public schools do not have a selection process and must by law educate all children in the district regardless of need or ability, this system of paying private schools with public money would potentially set up an increasingly unbalanced dichotomy where the neediest students are all being educated in a public school system with fewer and fewer resources to meet their needs. In the case of Miller Place, Federal funding and grants are essential to help us serve our neediest students. The money we receive through IDEA, Title I and Title IIA grants adds up to \$1,013,953 for the 2016-17 school year and is necessary to provide academic support to students who are struggling.

Another factor that would further compound the fiscal effects of the voucher system on our public schools is the cost of transportation. As more people enroll their children in private and parochial schools using vouchers, the public school system, which no longer receives that money in aid and still has to cover the cost of transportation for these students, would essentially be starved of resources. The potential inequities of this system are staggering if you continue to extrapolate this formula over several budget seasons.

With all of this in mind we would be remiss as Board members if we did not write to urge you and your fellow Senators to take a thorough and critical look at the nomination of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education and consider the possible repercussions of such appointment. We hope that you will oppose her nomination so that a better candidate can be found.

Yours sincerely,

The Miller Place UFSD Board of Education

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