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January 12, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate HELP Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate HELP Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) we are writing to request that during the confirmation hearing for Betsy DeVos, the nominee for U.S. Secretary of Education, you inquire about her strategies to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children and youth with disabilities. It is our understanding that Betsy DeVos has a history of advocating for the use of public dollars to support private schools. CEC asks you to seek clarity regarding her plans to support FAPE through public education.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)—an international association of special educators, administrators, related service personnel, higher education faculty, and researchers—is the voice and vision of special education. Our mission is to advance the success of children with exceptionalities. We accomplish our mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. CEC continues to support the core purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

- To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;
- To ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected;
- To assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities;
- To assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;
- To ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services; and
- To assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Currently, over 6.7 million children and youth with disabilities benefit from individualized special education and related services and early intervention provided by IDEA. These services delivered by special educators and early interventionists are tailored to meet the specific needs of each child and are planned and developed with the active participation of families and delivered in public schools and early intervention programs.

CEC believes that vouchers that use public funds to support private schools both contradict and undermine central purposes of civil rights laws designed to protect children and youth with disabilities and their families for the following reasons:

- Absence of necessary accountability;
- No guarantee of FAPE;
- Families must discard their procedural protections;
- Segregation within their private school;
- No guarantee of equal access;
- Promotes re-segregation rather than diversity; and
- Uses public education funds for private schools.

CEC also submitted questions to your offices in December for the confirmation hearing regarding issues critical to CEC members including:

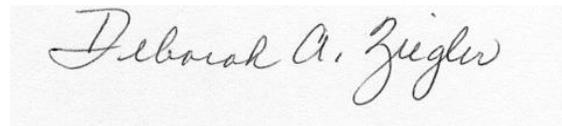
- Well prepared, sufficient special and gifted education workforce;
- Well-resourced special and gifted education programs in the public sector;
- Equity in special and gifted education specifically as it relates to significant disproportionality in identification, placement and discipline;
- Innovative research and development to advance the understanding of and practices for teaching, learning, and organizing education systems; and
- Achievement gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students who are gifted and talented and their more advantaged, high ability peers.

CEC thanks you for considering our positions and encourages you to raise these issues in the upcoming confirmation hearing for the U.S. Secretary of Education.

CEC will continue to partner with the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education in guaranteeing the civil rights of all children and youth with exceptionalities and their families, ensuring high-quality, evidence-based practices including individualized specialized services to support children and youth in their development and education and assist them in achieving positive educational, developmental and behavioral outcomes and results.

Please feel free to contact me at [debz@cec.sped.org](mailto:debz@cec.sped.org) if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah A. Ziegler". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Deborah A. Ziegler, Ed.D.

Director  
Policy and Advocacy

Cc: Members of the Senate HELP Committee