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Executive Director

January 19, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander   The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman   Ranking Member

US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), we write to express serious concerns with a number of the responses that Betsy DeVos provided at her confirmation hearing earlier this week, and to urge you to postpone any votes on her confirmation until Mrs. DeVos has clarified her support for the federal role in ensuring that every child with a disability receive a free, appropriate public education consistent with federal law.

AUCD works to advance policies, practices and research that improve the health, education, social and economic well-being of children and adults with disabilities, their families and their communities through a national network of university centers in every state and territory. We have a strong interest in promoting quality education and supporting the federal government's role in protecting the rights of students with disabilities in America's classrooms.

At her hearing on Wednesday, Mrs. DeVos made a number of statements that were particularly troubling, especially given the history of strong bipartisan support for civil rights and accountability in the area of education. Responding to questions from members of the Senate HELP Committee, Mrs. DeVos

- Would not commit to continuing to collect information from all schools regarding discipline practices, bullying and harassment;
- Refused to acknowledge that all public, public charter, and private schools that accept federal funds should be held to the same accountability standards;
- Stated that she believes meeting the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was an issue "best left to the states";
- Would not commit to prohibiting schools from requiring families to relinquish their IDEA rights if a federal voucher program is instituted in the future; and
- Would not commit to continuing the 2011 requirements of colleges and universities to investigate allegations of sexual assault and harassment.

In response to an IDEA question from Senator Hassan, Mrs. DeVos acknowledged that she may have been confused about the federal law. We respectfully request that you provide Mrs. DeVos an opportunity to clarify her understanding and support of federal enforcement of the civil rights of students with disabilities under IDEA before there is a vote on her confirmation. Millions of American children and families count on the US Department of Education to safeguard their

rights under federal law, and they deserve a Secretary of Education who is unequivocal in her commitment to civil rights enforcement.

Sincerely,

Celia S. Feinstein, MA   Andrew J. Imparato
President   Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
         Senate Majority Leader
         The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
         Senate Minority Leader