



January 25, 2017

Senator Charles Schumer
United State Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand and Senator Schumer,

On behalf of the nearly 300,000 members of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (herein after “NYS PTA”) and the 2.4 million New York school-aged children and their families, we write to you to express our deep concern with many of the education positions Education Secretary Nominee Betsy DeVos has communicated during her recent confirmation hearing. We also express our concern about her lack of qualifications in the public education arena and how this will affect her ability to lead the U.S Department of Education.

Nationally, public schools educate approximately ninety percent of students and NYS PTA fully supports equitable and adequate funding for all public school students. In many states – even in many districts in New York – public schools are already woefully underfunded. New York’s public school students are still owed an astounding \$4.3 billion in school aid stemming from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. Every child – no matter their zip code – deserves a high quality education from our public school system. It is our mission to make every child’s potential a reality. This cannot be accomplished if our public school system is not adequately supported, both fiscally and programmatically.

NYS PTA recently called for continued state and federal commitment to our English Language Learners (ELL) and their families. New York State has long been the gateway for immigrant success; the door to the American Dream. We are proud that New York schools support more than 210,000 ELL students and their families. We need to continue to build the success of our diverse community through investments and support for our key resource – our children.

NYS PTA also urged the reauthorization of the Federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and continues to support the expansion of protections for ALL students, especially our

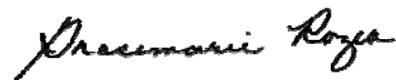
students with disabilities. As detailed in the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities January 9, 2017 letter, the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) continues to reinforce the significance of IDEA and the congressional intent to align ESSA with IDEA to see that all students' needs are met. Since the enactment of IDEA in 1975, millions of children have appropriately received an education unique to their specific needs. Federal and state support for our students with disabilities and their families continues to be a critical issue facing our schools and cannot be ignored. Rather, we must find unique and new ways to expand services and programs for students with disabilities to ensure each child, no matter which state they reside in, is protected as necessary.

NYS PTA is wholly opposed to portability and any type of voucher system for education. While we support parental choice in deciding which school a child attends, this choice cannot be at the expense of the public school system. Voucher and voucher-like programs are harmful education policies that divert necessary and scarce resources away from the public school system, often to private and religious schools. As discussed in the January 9, 2017 letter from the National Coalition for Public Schools, there is little to no relevant evidence that voucher programs increase student achievement or provide greater opportunities to low-income students. Further, voucher and voucher-like programs often lack public accountability and can lead to great fraud and abuse.

NYS PTA continues to urge state and local officials to enact law to prohibit the discharging of firearms within one-half mile from a school building and other prevention measures to ensure the safety of our students. Both National PTA and NYS PTA have strong positions on gun safety and violence prevention and look forward to continuing to work with both state and federal officials to see all violence, especially gun violence, reduced.

We appreciate your commitment to our children in New York and your leadership on these issues. NYS PTA looks forward to working with you to ensure our students and schools are adequately supported. We can be reached at any time for questions or concerns at 518-452-8808 or president@nyspta.org and execdirector@nyspta.org.

Sincerely,



Gracemarie Rozea
President



Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, Esq.
Executive Director