

**EDUCATION
CIVIL RIGHTS
ALLIANCE**

September 12, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We, the undersigned members of Leading Educator Ambassadors for Equity (LEAE) of the Education Civil Rights Alliance (ECRA), write to express our support for ED-DOJ School Discipline Guidance Package issued in 2014 and urge you not to rescind or weaken it.

LEAE is comprised of leading, award-winning educators from across the nation who seek to elevate educator voices on equity and education civil rights -- both amongst other educators and with the media, policymakers, and the public. We believe that rescinding this guidance will place our students in greater danger of having their education civil rights violated, as we have already seen time and again in our schools and communities.

Of course, you know well the racial disparity statistics from your agency's Civil Rights Data Collection that support the need for this guidance, such as the fact that Black male students represented 8 percent of enrolled students and accounted for 25 percent of students who received an out-of-school suspension, and Black female students represented 8 percent student enrollment and account for 14 percent of students who received an out-of-school suspension. We want to tell you about some of our own children who need you to maintain this guidance to ensure that they can have opportunities to learn, achieve, and succeed. Jason, a five-year old Kindergarten student, was suspended for bumping into a friend at recess. No one sought to ask him any questions, as they punished him under the zero tolerance strict discipline policy. More disheartening was that the children in his classroom who displayed similar behavior, but who were not of color, were disciplined differently than he was. As a matter of fact, in Jason's school, students of color were 4 times more likely to be suspended than those who were not. In Jason's school district, a concerned group of stakeholders were able to show the School Board and those who set guidelines about school discipline the Guidance and encourage them to move away from zero tolerance policies into restorative policies. Without the Guidance and the resources, many students like Jason are at risk of falling into the school-to-prison pipeline. It is evident that we still have a long way to go to ensure that disparities no longer exist based on religion, race, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation, and until we fully realize the promises in the Guidance, we need to maintain -- and not in any way weaken -- the Guidance; in fact, we need to further bolster the work of the Office of Civil Rights in enforcing non-discrimination in school discipline under the law.

Education Civil Rights Alliance
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Linking the Guidance to recent school shootings is both irresponsible and dangerous, as there is zero evidence to suggest the two are related in any way. As educators, parents, and citizens, we strongly oppose any efforts to rescind or cripple the Guidance, and implore you to keep it in place. To that end, we, the undersigned members of LEAE, request a meeting with you in order to share ideas on how to protect students' education civil rights and advance education equity. We believe that we are better together, and look forward to your favorable response to our request for a meeting to discuss keeping the Guidance in place.

Sincerely,

Brett Bigham
2014 Oregon Teacher of the Year

Estella Owoimaha-Church
2017 Global Teacher Prize Finalist

Sydney Chaffee
2017 National Teacher of the Year

Thomas Rademacher
2014 Minnesota Teacher of the Year

Dr. Jemelleh Coes
2014 Georgia Teacher of the Year

Gloria Robertson
2014 Oregon Teacher of the Year

Dr. Melissa Collins
2018 Global Teacher Prize Finalist

Monica Washington
2014 Texas Teacher of the Year

Megan Olivia Hall
2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year

Kelisa Wing
2017 DoDEA State Teacher of the Year

Rick Joseph
2017 Michigan Teacher of The Year

Dr. Maryann Woods-Murphy
2010 New Jersey Teacher of the Year

Athanasia (Sia) Kyriakakos
2017 Maryland Teacher of the Year

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