



January 9, 2017

Honorable Elizabeth Warren, United States Senator for Massachusetts
2400 JFK Federal Building
15 New Sudbury Street
Boston, MA 02203

Dear Senator Warren,

As the Association representing the 70 Massachusetts commonwealth charter public schools, we are writing to express our concerns over the nomination of Elisabeth DeVos as U.S. Secretary of Education. We do not express these reservations lightly, but we believe it is important to raise certain issues that should be addressed by the nominee.

Both President-elect Trump and Ms. DeVos are strong supporters of public charter schools, and we are hopeful they will continue the bipartisan efforts of the Clinton, Bush and Obama Administrations to promote the continued expansion of high quality charters while pursuing reforms that will strengthen traditional public schools.

But we are concerned about media reports of Ms. DeVos' support for school vouchers and her critical role in creating a charter system in her home state of Michigan that has been widely criticized for lax oversight and poor academic performance, and appears to be dominated by for-profit interests.

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2014/06/22/michigan-spends-1b-on-charter-schools-but-fails-to-hold/77155074/>

As the senior Senator from Massachusetts and a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP), which will hold hearings on the nomination, you will be in a position to ensure the nominee commits to holding the national charter school movement to the highest levels of accountability and oversight that are the hallmark of the Massachusetts charter system.

By all independent accounts, Massachusetts has the best charter school system in the country. We are providing high quality public school choices for parents across our state. Our urban schools are serving the highest need children in Massachusetts, and are producing results that have researchers double-checking their math. These gains held across all demographic groups, including African American, Latino, and children living in poverty.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/03/18/gains-boston-charter-schools-outpace-those-district-peers-according-six-year-study/hCpVGMMeEQvNODUvB6bXhcK/story.html>)

The cornerstone of the Massachusetts charter public school system is accountability. The process of obtaining and keeping a charter is deliberately difficult. The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is the sole authorizer and historically has approved only one out of every five applications. Once approved, each charter school must submit to annual financial audits by independent auditors and annual performance reviews by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Every five years, each charter must be renewed after a process as rigorous as the initial application process. For-profit charter schools are prohibited by Massachusetts law.

Our schools have also created partnerships with many Massachusetts public school districts to foster collaboration and best practice sharing, and have forged an historic Compact between Boston charter public schools and the Boston Public Schools that has become a national model.

Bipartisan support has been key to the development and success of the Massachusetts system. Created in 1993 by a Democratic Legislature and a Republican Governor, public charter schools have continued to receive support from all Governors, Republican and Democratic alike, and Democratic legislative leaders.

If the new President and his nominee intend to advance the cause of school choice across the country, they should look to Massachusetts for their path forward.

The history of charter schools in Michigan offers a more cautionary tale. The same researchers from Stanford that declared Massachusetts charter public schools an unqualified success, had mixed reviews for Michigan's charters.

According to media reports, last year Ms. DeVos actively campaigned against bipartisan legislation that would have provided more oversight for Michigan's charters. If these reports are true, we are deeply concerned that efforts to grow school choice without a rigorous accountability system will reduce the quality of charter schools across the country. We hope you agree that quality, not quantity, should be the guiding principle of charter expansion. Without high levels of accountability, the model fails.

We ask that you use the hearing to probe the incoming Administration's intentions regarding education policy in general and school choice and quality specifically.

We'd be happy to provide you with more information on the Massachusetts model and would welcome a meeting with your staff to brief them on our concerns.

Sincerely,

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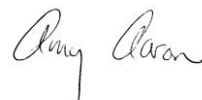
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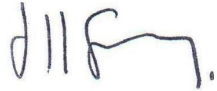
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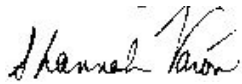
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