

June 12, 2015

Senator Roy Blunt, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Representative Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Representative Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Re: Request for increase in appropriations for the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Dept. of Education

Dear Senators Blunt and Murray & Representatives Cole and DeLauro:

We write on behalf of the disability, civil and women's rights, and sexual and domestic violence communities to express our strong support re: the requested budget increase of \$31 million for the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education (OCR). The work that OCR does to ensure the safety and unfettered access to educational opportunities of our constituents – including students with disabilities and student survivors of domestic, dating or sexual violence (both K-12 and in higher education) – encompasses nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  (or over 15,000) of the complaints that OCR responded to in FY 2013-14. Additionally, OCR staff provided a total of 678 technical assistance presentations with respect to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act during that same time period. This work has had a positive impact and resonated in schools and communities as they strive to better support students under often very trying circumstances.

OCR has made vital contributions to advance the issue of campus sexual assault, both in its work on behalf of individual student survivors and on the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. Primary and secondary schools as well as institutions of higher education are increasingly knowledgeable, responsive and proactive with respect to preventing and addressing sexual assault within their domains. We attribute a significant amount of the culture shift that is taking place to the increased attention to using Title IX and other laws to better address sexual violence on campuses. OCR's leadership, technical assistance and willingness to hold schools, colleges and universities accountable, and secure for

students the kind of supports that they need in order to continue to pursue their education have been pivotal in bringing this change about.

Additionally, OCR has worked to ensure that schools and districts afford students the climate, access and services they need, and to hold schools accountable when students with disabilities are discriminated against. They have worked tirelessly to address the high suspension and discipline rates of students with disabilities, to ensure that all school programs, including athletics programs are accessible to all students, and to address campus sexual assault involving students with disabilities. We have also been grateful for their leadership regarding the responsibility of schools to address bullying and harassment as well as their work to ensure effective communication supports for students with hearing, vision or speech impairments.

As we close and reiterate our support for OCR's budget increase, we wish to offer some context: OCR's budget request seeks to restore staffing to a level adequate to timely respond to a volume of complaints that has nearly doubled over the last 10 years even as staffing levels have continuously declined. In order to provide our communities with both the protections and opportunities that they deserve and enable them to remain in school, OCR simply must have more staff in order to be responsive. As our communities fully acknowledge the major constraints under which the Labor/HHS appropriations subcommittee continues to work, we hope that you will join together to provide OCR with a level of funding that ensures that our communities can pursue their educational opportunities unconstrained by violence, harassment, discrimination, or other impediments.

Sincerely,

American Association of University Women  
The Arc  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Carry that Weight  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
Futures without Violence  
Know Your IX  
Legal Momentum  
Maryland Women's Heritage Center  
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Center for Victims of Crime  
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Domestic Violence Hotline  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
National Women's Law Center  
Wider Opportunities for Women  
Women's Law Project