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January 9, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Senate HELP Committee:

We write to you on behalf of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU) with regard to the United States Senate's consideration of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education.

The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America is the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization representing nearly 1,000 congregations nationwide. As a non-partisan, religious organization, it is our practice not to endorse nominees for cabinet positions while their confirmation is pending. However, we wish to express our view on the issues of school choice and nonpublic education, which will likely be discussed during Ms. DeVos's upcoming nomination hearing.

Many members of the Orthodox Jewish community depend on alternative education choices for their children. The Orthodox Union has committed itself to supporting educational institutions that instill in our children the highest moral values, a depth of knowledge, and proficiency in skills that will enable them to support themselves, their families, and contribute to society.

To ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive a quality education, the OU has long advocated for school choice initiatives. On the federal level, the OU has supported many initiatives and legislation that gives parents choices and flexibility in the education of their children. On the state level the OU has been active in several states to support creative approaches to ensuring all children have the necessary support to succeed, regardless of their education institution. Such legislation and initiatives also elevate the level of education in public schools and serve as a model for educational reform throughout the nation.

Reforms to K-12 education that empower parents above bureaucracies are long overdue—and Ms. DeVos has a long history of advocating for and supporting such reforms. School choice models have been successful in Washington, DC, Detroit, New York, and many other school districts. All who care about our students succeeding should support Ms. DeVos and hope that she, too, succeeds.

In recent federal legislation, the OU was pleased to work with you on “Every Student Succeeds Act” because of the proportional funding set-aside and other provisions that supported equitable participation of children in nonpublic schools. This “equitable participation” provided low-income students attending religious schools, private schools, and home schools their fair share of federal services offered under this law. The OU is eager to continue working with the Administration and Congress on access to education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their school.

With a new Administration and new leadership at the Department of Education, we are hopeful that the 115th Congress will make education initiatives—including school choice and support for nonpublic education—a top priority.

Sincerely,

Nathan Diament

Yehuda Neuberger