

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

We write as advocates for students, student loan borrowers, and more accessible, affordable, accountable, and equitable higher education nationwide to express our opposition to Linda McMahon's nomination to serve as United States Secretary of Education. Throughout her recent confirmation hearing, Ms. McMahon's responses to questions from members of the HELP committee conveyed her commitment to the president's stated goal of dismantling the Department of Education—a disastrous direction that would imperil essential civil rights protections for students, throw student loan repayment and financial aid processes into chaos, and threaten the ability of students to pursue postsecondary credentials and degrees that enable them to participate fully in the civic and economic life of our country.¹ We urge the committee to oppose her nomination, and to oppose the Project 2025 plan she seeks to implement.

We appreciate Ms. McMahon's commitments to ensuring the effective flow of Congressionally appropriated funds and ensuring that federal programs to support students and borrowers are not disrupted. Specifically:

- Continuing to offer students Pell Grants without interruption or reductions in eligibility;
- Carrying out prompt approvals for borrower support programs, such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness;
- Supporting increased funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities; and
- Affirming that complete elimination of functions of the Department of Education would require Congressional approval.

However, we were alarmed during her confirmation hearing that Ms. McMahon:

- Refused to protect students' private data from the intrusion of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) operatives;
- Failed to explain the DOGE-directed cuts to essential research funded through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES);

¹ K. Floyd, P. Granville, C. Hinds, & H. Potter. (February 12, 2025). "How Gutting the U.S. Department of Education Would Hurt Students and Their Families." The Century Foundation, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/how-gutting-the-u-s-department-of-education-would-hurt-students-and-their-families/>.

- Speculated about dismantling the Department of Education without addressing the interruptions and disruptions such action would cause, or explaining how it is part of a plan to improve educational outcomes; and
- Refused to confirm that supporting decades-old, well-established practices like teaching courses in academic fields including African American history and student-led affinity groups like the National Society of Black Engineers would not imperil federal funding.

Sadly, Ms. McMahon has shown greater interest in undermining higher education than she has in defending its value or the value of the Department. As secretary, Ms. McMahon would lead an effort from within the Department of Education to diminish its capacity, which in turn would diminish the ability of our nation's students to have confidence in the quality of their postsecondary programs of study, their ability to access the critical financial aid so many low- and middle-income students need to pay for college, and the prospect of bending the cost curve to make higher education more affordable for the future. Ms. McMahon's stated priorities stand mostly opposite the interests of our nation's students and their families.

The Senate performs an essential constitutional role to check and balance a president's appointments through advice and consent. Absent a full restoration of the critical research of IES; a repudiation of plans to drastically reduce the Department's talented and dedicated workforce; a commitment to rein in the unelected and unqualified DOGE team; and commitments to continue to offer affordable and fair repayment plans, hold colleges accountable for students left with high debt and low earnings, and provide a genuine opportunity for loan discharges in cases of misrepresentation and fraud, the Senate should not vote to confirm Ms. McMahon. We have seen no indicators of such commitments, and we urge senators to oppose this self-destructive agenda of departmental dismantling.

Our nation's students deserve better, and we urge you to use your power to stand up for them and the Department of Education that helps them thrive.

Sincerely,

The Institute for College Access & Success

Joined by:

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

EdTrust

End Rape On Campus

National Education Association

New America Higher Education Policy Program
Project on Predatory Student Lending
Stop Sexual Assault in Schools
Student Borrower Protection Center
Student Debt Crisis Center
The Century Foundation Higher Education Policy Team
Young Invincibles
David Halperin, Attorney

CC: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions