



April 16, 2026

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and our members and supporters nationwide, I urge you to ensure that the U.S. Department of Education is fulfilling its statutory obligations to protect the civil rights of all students and to use the FY27 Labor–HHS–Education appropriations process to block the Administration's efforts to shift the Department's core responsibilities to other agencies.

The U.S. Department of Education, particularly the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), is essential to enforcing federal civil rights laws and protecting more than 70 million students from discrimination based on protected characteristics. However, recent decisions have significantly weakened OCR's enforcement capabilities through mass layoffs and the closure of seven of its twelve regional offices. While the agency maintains that this has not affected its ability to protect students' civil rights, a recent Government Accountability Office report found that nearly 90% of approximately 9,000 complaints resolved between March and September 2025 were through dismissal. This raises serious concerns about whether students' complaints are being investigated thoroughly and whether they are receiving timely and meaningful remedies.

AAUW and more than 100 survivor advocacy organizations have already urged the Department to take immediate action to address the handling of sexual violence complaints under Title IX. These concerns reflect a broader pattern in which weakened enforcement leaves students without clear pathways to seek justice.

This erosion of enforcement has real consequences for students. Sexual violence remains widespread in education—more than 1 in 4 undergraduate women experience sexual assault, and nearly 1 in 5 high school girls report experiencing sexual violence—yet OCR has failed to respond adequately. According to recent reporting, OCR has opened fewer than 10 new sexual violence investigations in 2025 and has made little progress in resolving complaints in this area, leaving many survivors without meaningful recourse. Students facing discrimination are increasingly forced to navigate unsafe environments, withdraw from school, or abandon their educational goals altogether.

At the same time, the Department has taken steps to shift responsibilities to other federal agencies through interagency agreements (IAAs). These actions undermine congressional intent, weaken accountability, and risk further diminishing the delivery of critical civil rights protections. Because Congress established the Department of Education and defines its responsibilities, these transfers raise serious legal and constitutional concerns and risk limiting the Department's ability to carry out its mission.



Congress has already demonstrated bipartisan support for maintaining the Department's core functions through FY26 appropriations bills. Building on that precedent, we urge you to take the following actions:

- **Ensure rigorous oversight of the Department and OCR**, including hearings and briefings to assess compliance with statutory civil rights obligations.
- **Strengthen FY27 appropriations guardrails** to prohibit the use of funds for interagency agreements that transfer the Department's responsibilities.
- **Ensure education programs remain housed within the Department**, preserving accountability, transparency, and effective civil rights and civil rights enforcement.

Protecting the civil rights of all students is a legal and moral obligation and should not be optional. Without a fully functional Department of Education and a strong Office for Civil Rights, millions of students, particularly women and girls, are left vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Thank you for your time and commitment to protecting students across the nation. I urge you to ensure that the U.S. Department of Education fulfills its obligations and that Congress safeguards its responsibilities through the FY27 appropriations process. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-728-3300 or kissellm@aauw.org with any questions.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Meghan Kissell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Meghan Kissell
Senior Director, Policy & Member Advocacy