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December 6, 2024

Senator Bernie Sanders
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
332 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), which represents over 800,000 federal and District of Columbia employees at over 70 different agencies, including the more than 2,800 bargaining unit employees at Department of Education (DOED), I write to assert our strong opposition to any legislation that would eliminate the Department of Education, including S. 5384, recently introduced by Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD). Though it has the lowest number of personnel of all 15 Cabinet-level agencies, the Department of Education provides essential support to America's students and 13,000 school districts nationwide.

School funding and policy decisions are largely conducted on the state and local level, but the Department of Education provides crucial support to schools in low-income districts throughout the country. Students with disabilities in particular benefit tremendously from resources that cash-strapped school districts would otherwise struggle to provide. The Department also administers key assessment and data collection, critical to ensuring accountability and allowing good schools to become great schools. It provides professional development for teachers and conducts key educational research and innovation grants. The Head Start program administered by the Department currently supports over 800,000 preschool-aged children.

The Department's Federal Student Aid office administers billions of dollars in essential financial aid annually; eliminating it would put millions of students at risk of not being able to afford college. The Department runs FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), the application process for students to apply for financial aid. By coordinating a standard application process, both students and colleges benefit. Once the financial aid is awarded, the Department manages the federal student debt portfolio.

Public education has always been critical to the economic, political, and social welfare of the nation and the Department of Education plays a crucial role supporting our schools, universities, students and their families. We urge you to do everything possible to support the department in achieving its important mission and reject any attempts to eliminate it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julie M. Jansen".

Director of Legislation

