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May 6, 2020

The Honorable Colin Allred
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Allred:

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. ATPE is the leading educator association in Texas, with approximately 100,000 members statewide, including over 3,000 members in your congressional district. We write to you today to express appreciation for the \$30 billion Congress has recently appropriated through the CARES Act to help address the impact of the COVID-19 virus on public education, and to join other education stakeholders in letting you know more federal help will be needed before the next school year begins.

We also write to ask for your support for strong congressional oversight of how the U.S. Department of Education is spending the federal taxpayer money from the CARES Act and any funds from future relief legislation that is meant to go to states and school districts hardest hit by this public health emergency. Our members were concerned to learn that Secretary DeVos has used more than \$300 million that was intended for states with the greatest coronavirus-related needs to establish competitive grant programs to fund virtual learning and private school voucher programs, including \$180 million for a "Rethink K-12 Education Model Grant" program. These so-called "microgrant" programs are unfortunately consistent with the Secretary's long-time desire to reduce or eliminate federal formula funding for education and replace it with a system of competitive block grants to the states and for private and home school vouchers with few quality standards attached. It is particularly concerning that emergency relief legislation intended to provide funding to the states and schools hardest hit by the virus may instead flow to private vendors via unregulated vouchers.

We ask that in future virus and economic relief legislation, the Congress provide the U.S. Department of Education very clear intent on the purpose of money appropriated for public education and how it is to be spent, and limit the Secretary's ability to divert federal taxpayer money to create her own pet programs not authorized in the legislation. Additionally, we ask that Congress consider taking similar steps in the bill funding the Department for the 2021 fiscal year. It is critical that our limited federal education funding get to the districts, schools, and students who need it most, and the current federal funding formulas do just that.

Please feel free to reach out to our federal governmental relations consultant, David Pore, at dpore@hslawmail.com with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Shannon Holmes, Ed.D.
ATPE Executive Director

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