

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As an incoming Secretary, you pledged a renewed effort to protect students from sexual violence and to ensure fair procedures throughout the investigatory process. As students on college campuses across the nation, we share your concerns about the rash of assaults on campuses as well as the way in which campus authorities respond. However, we write to you today to express our concern that the proposed revision of Title IX guidelines on university campuses will place an undue burden on survivors of sexual assault.

It is well known that a majority of survivors never come forward publicly. Though every survivor of an assault may have a different reason for not reporting, it seems clear that the stigmas associated with rape and sexual assault is a contributing factor across cases and campuses. We believe society and our own student communities are making progress to reduce victim shaming and victim blaming, no doubt in part prompted by Title IX guidelines that help ensure that allegations cannot be ignored.

Our concern is that this progress will be impeded by the new guidelines under your consideration, namely, raising the burden of proof necessary for launching investigation proceedings. Without clear, unwavering commitment from elected officials and government leaders, yourself chief among them, it will be too easy for school administrators to prioritize the avoidance of bad publicity over holding perpetrators responsible for their actions. Consistent policies and strong enforcement make campuses safer, allowing all students to be able to focus on learning in and out of the classroom and building the skills necessary to achieve in a globally competitive work environment.

This is why we respectfully urge you to reconsider proposed changes to Title IX guidelines in order to continue upholding the spirit of past guidelines that empowered survivors to feel safe reporting an assault. We believe it is both possible and critical that the guidelines continue to emphasize the responsibility of collegiate administrators to make campuses safer and stay responsive to the needs of survivors while also ensuring the rights of those accused.

Sincerely,