

September 19, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As the nation’s oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association, National PTA is gravely concerned with the Department of Education’s reported plans to allow states and school districts to purchase firearms with Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) funds under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The intended purpose of this funding is to help schools provide students with important educational resources and ongoing direct services—such as comprehensive mental health programs, as well as drug, violence and bullying prevention programs—not the one-time purchase of firearms.

The use of Title IV-A funding to arm educators would divert funding away from critical student support services and run counter to its intended purpose of promoting a safe and healthy school climate. From a safety perspective, arming teachers, principals and other school personnel has not been proven to improve school safety. Increasing the number of firearms in schools could heighten threat levels, and our nation’s youth could be placed in dangerous learning environments.

Our association stands by the principle that the most effective day-to-day school climate is gun-free—which includes not arming teachers and administrators. The belief in having gun-free school campuses has not only been echoed by millions of concerned parents around the country, but by current law as well. In ESEA section 4102(5)(B), Congress defines the “Drug and Violence Prevention” program in Title IV-A as a program that seeks to establish “the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the bipartisan Stop School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program which was included in the enacted FY18 omnibus appropriations bill ensures “no amounts provided as a grant under this part may be used for provision to any person of a firearm or training in the use of a firearm.”<sup>2</sup> This language clearly shows that the Administration’s proposal is counter to congressional intent.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elementary and Secondary Education Act, section 4102(5)(B)

<sup>2</sup> H.R. 1625 – Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

National PTA strongly opposes the use of Title IV-A funding to arm teachers, and we call on the Department of Education to deny states and school districts the ability to use this funding to purchase firearms. We urge you to abandon this proposal immediately and clarify through guidance that Title IV funds should be used for their original intent—to provide students with direct and ongoing support services to promote a safe and healthy school climate and enhance student enrichment.

Sincerely,



James L. Accomando  
President  
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE  
Executive Director  
National PTA