



**For Immediate Release**  
**Wednesday, April 4, 2018**

**Contact: Natalia Garzon**  
212-965-2786 / [ngarzon@naacpldf.org](mailto:ngarzon@naacpldf.org)

## **Advocates Convey Support for Civil Rights and School Safety to Secretary DeVos**

Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and AAUW attended the School Safety and Climate Summit hosted by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

During their roundtable discussion with Secretary DeVos, civil rights advocates expressed their frustration about the absence of diverse communities in the conversation, their continued objection to anti-civil rights actions by the department, and their continued support for vital guidance on nondiscrimination in school discipline. Attendees voiced their support for a [letter](#) to the secretary from civil rights organizations representing girls, students with disabilities, and students who are LGBTQ, Native American, and Latino who were excluded from the summit.

“Racial discrimination in our nation’s educational systems persists and both the Departments of Education and Justice are failing to protect the civil rights and educational future of our Black and brown students,” **said Todd A. Cox, LDF’s Director of Policy.** “This administration must stop endangering students of color and instead ensure equal educational opportunities and foster educational excellence by upholding the federal school discipline guidance and promoting policies and programs that keep students safe.”

**Liz King, senior policy analyst and director of education policy for The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, said** “All children deserve to be safe and treated fairly in schools, but that goal cannot be achieved by undermining their civil rights or excluding their communities from conversations about their safety. This administration has taken one action after another to make schools less safe for LGBTQ students, sexual assault survivors, and any child who experiences systemic discrimination. It’s time to reverse course and provide educators and schools the resources and information they need to protect children and support their learning and development, not make it easier to kick children of color out of school.”

“We met with Secretary DeVos to emphasize our grave concerns about the U.S. Department of Education turning the clock back on important gains in promoting safe and welcoming schools for students of color. The long-term, devastating impact of the School to Prison Pipeline is one of the most significant civil rights issues of our time. Yet instead of seeking to address systemic inequities in school discipline, this administration may roll back protections for African American, Latino, and other minority students in the name of school safety. This misguided effort must be rejected. Instead, the Department of Education must retain its school discipline guidance and focus on building the positive, nurturing school climates that will ultimately lead to safer schools for all students,” **said Brenda Shum, director of the Educational Opportunities Project at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.**

“For over 135 years, AAUW has supported a strong system of public education that promotes gender fairness, equity, and diversity. Any attempts to rescind the 2014 school discipline guidance runs in direct opposition to our commitment to the advancement of all women and girls and to an education free of discrimination. We urge the Department of Education to stand by its commitment to protect students’ civil rights by keeping the effective and helpful guidance in place and by ensuring that no federal dollars are being used to underwrite discrimination against children of color, girls, children with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth,” **said Deborah J. Vagins, senior vice president of public policy and research at the American Association of University Women (AAUW).**

LDF submitted a letter addressed to Secretary DeVos and Attorney General Session at the meeting. Read the letter [here](#).

###

*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

*The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works to build an America as good as its ideals. For more information on The Leadership Conference and its 200-plus member organizations, visit [www.civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org).*

*The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. Now in its 55th year, the Lawyers’*

*Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is continuing its quest to “Move America Toward Justice.” The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice for all, particularly in the areas of criminal justice, fair housing and community development, economic justice, educational opportunities, and voting rights.*

*The American Association of University Women (AAUW) empowers women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Our nonpartisan, nonprofit organization has more than 170,000 members and supporters across the United States, as well as 1,000 local branches and 800 college and university members. Since AAUW’s founding in 1881, our members have examined and taken positions on the fundamental issues of the day — educational, social, economic, and political. Learn more and join us at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org).*