



April 10, 2025

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we write to express our strong opposition to any budget cuts or funding reallocations that would undermine the U.S. Department of Education's capacity to serve students and uphold civil rights in education. Specifically, we urge you to reject proposals that would reduce or eliminate the Department's enforcement of civil rights laws or its vital role in managing and protecting student loan borrowers.

For more than 140 years, AAUW has worked to advance equity in education, and today we are the nation's largest provider of graduate fellowships and grants for women. We have seen firsthand how robust federal protections and student support systems help women—particularly women of color—access and complete higher education, shrink the gender pay gap, and move toward economic security. Undermining the Department of Education's ability to protect those rights and services would severely erode its civil rights and accountability infrastructure, risking harm to millions of students and borrowers nationwide.

The Department of Education plays a central role in enforcing Title IX and other civil rights laws that safeguard students against discrimination based on sex, race, disability, and more. These are not abstract policy issues; they directly affect students' safety, ability to complete degrees, and trust in institutions.

More than half of sex discrimination complaints to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights involve sexual harassment or sexual violence. Students in higher education represent a significant portion of these complaints, particularly around inadequate institutional responses or retaliation. With recent cuts to regional civil rights offices, weakened enforcement of civil rights claims could have especially serious consequences for women in higher education. Parenting students—most of whom are women—could lose access to the accommodations and support necessary to complete their degrees. Survivors of sexual harassment and assault may lose trust in the Title IX process when enforcement is delayed or under-resourced.

Furthermore, the Department is the only agency equipped to manage the federal student loan system with an eye toward borrower protections. Women hold nearly two-thirds of student debt in the U.S., and Black women carry the highest average balances. This debt burden is compounded by persistent gender and racial wage gaps, delaying financial independence and disproportionately harming the very borrowers for whom education is meant to uplift. The Department ensures loan servicer accountability, provides income-driven repayment options, and protects borrowers from abuse—responsibilities that cannot be replicated by the Small Business Administration.

As Congress begins work on the FY26 appropriations bills, we urge you to prioritize the stability and integrity of the U.S. Department of Education's civil rights and borrower protection functions. Now is the time to reinforce, not roll back, the systems that keep higher education accessible and accountable for all. Co-sponsorship associated with this issue may be scored in



the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record* for the 119th Congress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-728-3300 or [kissellm@aauw.org](mailto:kissellm@aauw.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Meghan Kissell".

Meghan Kissell, MSW  
Senior Director, Policy & Member Advocacy