The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

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February 11, 2021

The Leadership Conference

Dear Senator,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the 40 organizations listed below, we urge you to support the confirmation of Miguel Cardona to be the next U.S. Secretary of Education. All students and caregivers in this country want the best education, support, and dignity for themselves and their own children. We join with them, and our coalition welcomes the opportunity to support a nominee who has a demonstrated record as an impactful educator and who has expressed a commitment to upholding the civil rights of all students in America and advancing equity at the U.S. Department of Education.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 220 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. Equal access to education has long been a cornerstone of the civil rights movement. The Secretary of Education's role as an enforcer of education and civil rights laws[1] is central to advancing our shared vision of an inclusive and diverse system of high-quality public education that enables every student to live up to their potential.

Dr. Cardona's background as a classroom teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, and commissioner in Connecticut has provided him important experience for this role and illustrates his familiarity with the contours of the education system. Furthermore, Dr. Cardona's early years as a low-income, English learner in Connecticut's public school system equip him with a critical perspective on the experience of some of our most marginalized students.[2] In his hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on February 3, Dr. Cardona expressed his commitment to protecting the civil rights of all students. Dr. Cardona's personal and professional experiences demonstrate that he is capable of and committed to enforcing the law in the service of students and equal opportunity – as is required of the Department of Education's chief executive.

The COVID-19 public health crisis and a long overdue reckoning with white supremacy and systemic racism have laid bare the significant barriers facing students and families based on race, ethnicity, household income, first language, disability, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and pregnancy/parenting status), immigration status, or other aspects of their background or identity. Long term closures of early childhood settings, K-12 schools, and college campuses, necessary to protect the safety and health of communities,

[1] Department of Education Organization Act (Public Law 96-88)
[2] See: https://ctmirror.org/2021/01/19/miguel-cardonas-ideas-about-education-were-forged-in-meriden-ct-now-he-will-bring-them-to-washington-d-c/

have significantly exacerbated longstanding inequities in our educational system. Inequities in school resources and the criminalization of children that preceded the recent crisis require urgent action by a Secretary of Education committed to advancing equity in every action taken across the department. Dr. Cardona has been a fierce advocate for some of the most marginalized students in Connecticut – including students of color, students with disabilities, low-income students, and English learners – and we expect he will continue do so as Secretary of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for implementing and enforcing laws protecting students from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and expectant/parenting status), and disability and those laws that provide for educational opportunity from early childhood through graduate school. The person responsible for leading that department must be committed to enforcing federal laws on behalf of every single student in this country. Our nation's Constitution, economy, future, and children deserve no less. As such, we urge you to support the confirmation of Dr. Miguel Cardona to be the next U.S. Secretary of Education. If you have any questions, please contact Arielle Atherley, policy analyst, at atherley@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Committee for Children
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Feminist Majority Foundation
GLSEN
Hindu American Foundation
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)
Lambda Legal
League of United Latin American Citizens
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)
National Action Network
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)

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National Association of Human Rights Workers
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools
National Education Association
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
Public Justice
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
SPLC Action Fund
Teach For America
UnidosUS
YWCA USA