



1350 I STREET NW  
SUITE 700  
WASHINGTON, DC 20005  
202-588-5180  
NWLC.ORG

February 12, 2025

Senator Bill Cassidy  
Chairman, Senate HELP Committee  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Oppose Confirmation of Linda McMahon for Secretary of Education**

Dear Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee:

The National Women's Law Center, which has advocated on behalf of women and girls for over fifty years, writes in strong opposition to the confirmation of Linda McMahon to lead the U.S. Department of Education. The Secretary of Education is responsible for ensuring that students across the country have access to equal educational opportunities in safe and inclusive school environments. However, Ms. McMahon's scant experience in public education and total disregard for the safety of students and children make it clear she is unqualified for this role. We urge you to oppose her confirmation.

The Secretary of Education is charged with leading and preserving the Department of Education, which was created based on a recognition that high quality public education, equally available to all, is foundational for our democracy and key to the success of individuals and families. Yet Ms. McMahon is one of the architects of Trump's plan to sabotage and dismantle the Department's core functions. The Department of Education's predecessor agency was first created more than 70 years ago and became the agency it is today in 1979 to strengthen federal protection and oversight of education as a civil right.<sup>1</sup> Confirming Ms. McMahon would be a betrayal of the promise of equal opportunity, as her primary goal as Secretary of Education will be to eviscerate

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education-- Pg 1* (last updated Jan. 15, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-overview/an-overview-of-the-us-department-of-education--pg-1>.

the Department—wreaking untold chaos and destruction upon 70 million students and likely blatantly flouting longstanding legal protections in the process.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the Education Secretary is entrusted with protecting and advancing the education of our nation’s 70 million students, including more than 60 million students at public institutions, but Ms. McMahon’s public education credentials are almost nonexistent. Except for a single college semester as a student teacher, she has no experience as an educator in either a K-12 school or university. She has no experience in public education administration, besides a brief one-year stint as a political appointee for a state board of education—from which she resigned after it came to light that she had falsely claimed to hold a bachelor’s degree in education.<sup>3</sup> Ms. McMahon’s primary education credential is sitting on the board of trustees of a private religious university.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the lack of experience in public education, reports that Ms. McMahon concealed more than a decade of child sexual abuse that she was obligated to prevent and address are alarming.<sup>5</sup> In October 2024, Ms. McMahon was named as a defendant in a federal lawsuit brought by a group of men who named that they experienced repeated sexual abuse as children by a World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) employee, Mel Phillips, while Ms. McMahon was the CEO of WWE.<sup>6</sup> The lawsuit<sup>7</sup> alleges that:

- From the early 1980s to 1992, Ms. McMahon and the other defendants allowed Phillips to entice young boys—many as young as 12 and 13<sup>8</sup>—to work for WWE so he could

---

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Saul *et al.*, *Her Wrestling Empire Was Said to Harm Children. Trump Chose Her for Education.*, New York Times (Nov. 28, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/28/us/linda-mcmahon-education-wrestling-wwe.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Beth Reinhard, *Trump’s education pick once incorrectly claimed to have education degree*, Washington Post (Nov. 20, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/11/20/mcmahon-trump-education-degree>.

<sup>4</sup> Sacred Heart University, *Linda E. McMahon Student Commons* (last viewed Jan. 30, 2025), <https://www.sacredheart.edu/sacred-heart-life/life-on-campus/linda-e-mcmahon-student-commons>; Robby Brod, *Trump administration profile: Linda McMahon*, Open Secrets (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2025/01/trump-administration-profile-linda-mcmahon> (Ms. McMahon has donated at least \$12 million to Sacred Heart University).

<sup>5</sup> Nadra Nittle, *McMahon would oversee student safety — but advocates worry about her own misconduct allegations*, The 19<sup>th</sup> (Nov. 25, 2024), <https://19thnews.org/2024/11/linda-mcmahon-education-leaders-concerned-misconduct-allegations>. These allegations surfaced as early as 2020. David Bixenspan, *WWE cofounder Linda McMahon, who runs Trump’s biggest super PAC, once hired a suspected child molester on the condition that he ‘stop chasing after kids.’ He didn’t.*, Business Insider (Oct. 29, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/linda-mcmahon-once-employed-an-accused-child-molester-2020-10>.

<sup>6</sup> The lawsuit also named Ms. McMahon’s husband, Vincent McMahon, and the WWE, as defendants.

<sup>7</sup> Compl. & Demand for Jury Trial, *Does 1-5 v. World Wrestling Entertainment, LLC et al.*, No. C-03-CV-24-004019, 2024 WL 4574048 (Md. Cir. Ct. Oct. 23, 2024), <https://dicellolevitt.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Date-Stamped-Does-1-5-v.-WWE-et-al.-Complaint-10.23.2024.pdf> [hereinafter WWE Complaint].

<sup>8</sup>WWE Complaint, *supra* note 7, at 3.

sexually abuse them,<sup>9</sup> including forcing them to engage in sex acts and share hotel beds with him naked,<sup>10</sup> despite Phillips’ misconduct being “common knowledge” amongst WWE employees.<sup>11</sup>

- The widespread knowledge of this abuse by WWE—and Ms. McMahon specifically—was confirmed in 2020 to *Business Insider* by a former WWE executive, who said that “it was just generally known, by everybody, that it was going on,” and that the McMahons “clearly knew what was going on, but really did nothing to stop it.”<sup>12</sup>
- As more and more allegations of sexual abuse against Phillips came to light, the McMahons fired Phillips in 1988 while concealing the reason for his absence and termination, only to rehire him just six weeks later on the condition that he “steer clear from the kids.”<sup>13</sup>
- Ms. McMahon’s husband later admitted in a 1992 interview with a reporter that he and Ms. McMahon knew that Phillips had a “peculiar and unnatural interest” in young children for years before they fired and rehired Phillips in 1988.<sup>14</sup>

It is the role of the Secretary of Education to ensure that no student’s educational opportunities are threatened by sex-based harassment or discrimination, including through rigorous enforcement of Title IX’s protections against sexual harassment and assault. These serious allegations that Ms. McMahon failed to intervene and covered up repeated sexual abuse of minors make her wholly unfit to serve in this role.

In addition, Ms. McMahon’s destructive attacks on students’ rights while at the helm of America First Policy Institute (AFPI) cast serious doubt on her ability to robustly enforce federal civil rights laws and create safe educational environments for all students. Ms. McMahon serves as the chair of AFPI, a group formed after Trump’s defeat in the 2020 election that has openly advocated for anti-LGBTQI+ policies, including the exclusion of transgender students from school spaces like sports<sup>15</sup> and the forcible outing of LGBTQI+ youth to their parents.<sup>16</sup> Ms.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 12, 14-15, 56-70.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>12</sup> David Bixenspan, *WWE cofounder Linda McMahon, who runs Trump's biggest super PAC, once hired a suspected child molester on the condition that he 'stop chasing after kids.' He didn't.*, *Business Insider* (Oct. 29, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/linda-mcmahon-once-employed-an-accused-child-molester-2020-10>; *see also* WWE Complaint, *supra* note 7, at 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 16, 17.

<sup>15</sup> America First Policy Institute, *Pillar III: Defend Female Athletes and Preserve Fairness in Women’s Sports* (last viewed Jan. 30, 2025), <https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/freedom-and-self-governance/defend-female-athletes-and-preserve-fairness-in-womens-sports>,

<sup>16</sup> America First Policy Institute, *Restoring Parental Rights in Schools* (Apr. 23, 2024), <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/restoring-parental-rights-in-schools> (model school board policy requiring “written authorization from a parent/guardian ... to change a child’s name or pronouns”).

McMahon also spearheaded AFPI’s recent attacks on the 2024 Title IX regulations,<sup>17</sup> which strengthened and clarified protections for student survivors of sexual harassment and assault, LGBTQI+ students, and pregnant and parenting students so they could continue their educations safely.

Furthermore, as AFPI chair, Ms. McMahon pushed for a litany of other education policies that harm students and teachers alike.<sup>18</sup> This includes undermining equal educational opportunity by defunding public schools to promote private school voucher programs.<sup>19</sup> Voucher programs drain resources from public schools and funnel taxpayer money to private schools that are unaccountable to the public, which includes private schools that were created for the purpose of serving white families fleeing integrated public schools.<sup>20</sup> AFPI’s agenda aligns closely with Project 2025, which has recommended eliminating Title I funding—which would devastate school districts and schools serving low-income students in the most economically vulnerable areas of our country and result in nearly 6% of teachers nationwide losing their jobs.<sup>21</sup> AFPI also seeks to undermine teachers’ ability to come together in a union to seek workplace protections and advocate for their students.<sup>22</sup> Ms. McMahon also seeks to micromanage public school curriculum and students’ access to books, threatening to withhold funds from schools that teach anything she and the Trump administration disagree with politically.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> America First Policy Institute, *The 9 on title IX What you need to know about the Biden administration’s proposed Changes to Title IX* (Sept. 9, 2022), <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/202209090the-9-on-title-ix-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-biden-administrations-proposed-changes-to-title-ix> (urging the public to advocate against the 2024 Title IX rule with the Department of Education, school board members, federal lawmakers, and social media).

<sup>18</sup> See America First Policy Institute, *America First Nomination: Linda McMahon* (Jan. 13, 2025), <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/america-first-nomination-linda-mcmahon>.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Cowen, *How School Voucher Programs Hurt Students*, Time (Apr. 19, 2023), <https://time.com/6272666/school-voucher-programs-hurt-students>.

<sup>20</sup> Amanda Litvinov, *Top Three Reasons Linda McMahon Should Not Be Secretary of Education*, NEA Today (Nov. 20, 2024), <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/top-three-reasons-linda-mcmahon-should-not-be-secretary-education>.

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Washington, *Linda McMahon Has No Education Experience Except Wanting to Defund Public Schools*, The Intercept (Dec. 30, 2024), <https://theintercept.com/2024/12/30/linda-mcmahon-trump-education-schools-wwe>.

<sup>22</sup> Laurie Todd-Smith, *America First vs America Last: K-12 Education Reforms*, America First Policy Institute (Oct. 2, 2024), <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/america-first-vs-america-last-k-12-education-reforms>.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Ms. McMahon supports the belief that it is incorrect to teach that “America’s foundation was built on racism.” America First Policy Institute, *Pillar IV: Give Parents More Control Over the Education of Their Children*, 4 (last viewed Jan. 30, 2025), [https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/assets/uploads/Pillar\\_4\\_-\\_Give\\_Parents\\_More\\_Control\\_Over\\_Their\\_Children%E2%80%99s\\_Education.pdf](https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/assets/uploads/Pillar_4_-_Give_Parents_More_Control_Over_Their_Children%E2%80%99s_Education.pdf). Ms. McMahon also rejects “Critical Race Theory and radical gender ideology,” framing any discussion of identity as “political indoctrination in classrooms.” America First Policy Institute, *America First Nomination: Linda McMahon* (Jan. 13, 2025), <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/america-first-nomination-linda-mcmahon>.

Our nation's students deserve an Education Secretary who is experienced in education policy and committed to robustly enforcing federal civil rights laws, preserving public education, and strengthening, not gutting, the Department of Education's ability to support students—regardless of their gender, LGBTQI+ status, immigration status, family income, race, ethnicity, religion, or disability. Students deserve someone who will advocate for them, not someone trailed by shocking allegations of knowingly sacrificing numerous children to a serial sexual abuser for more than a decade. Given Ms. McMahon's record, we have no confidence that she can meet these standards. The National Women's Law Center strongly opposes the confirmation of Linda McMahon and urges the U.S. Senate HELP Committee to reject this nomination. If you have questions about the Law Center's opposition to Ms. McMahon's nomination, please contact me, or Shiwali Patel, Director of Safe and Inclusive Schools, at [spatel@nwlc.org](mailto:spatel@nwlc.org).

Sincerely,



Fatima Goss Graves  
President and CEO