



Stop Special Needs Vouchers Wisconsin

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Parents Aghast at DeVos Confirmation Hearing Statements

Madison, WI – “Goodbye, special education.” That was the despairing online response of one Wisconsin parent of children with disabilities, upon watching the Senate confirmation hearing Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary. The families of Stop Special Needs Vouchers from across Wisconsin watched in disbelief as DeVos told Sen. Tim Kaine that meeting the requirements of the federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was “a matter that is best left to the states.” The educational rights and protections that families worked so hard in previous decades to win were suddenly declared as optional by the nominee for the position responsible for administering them.

“I couldn't sleep last night; haunting me were visions of what the DeVos appointment would mean for my kids, my schools and my community,” says Terri Hart-Ellis, whose 13 year old daughter Addie has an IEP in the Whitefish Bay school district. “IDEA guides and protects the supports needed for my daughter to be successful in school, for her teachers to be able to be effective. Without these protections for her and guidance for her teachers, her future is in doubt and the school community on the whole loses out.”

Disbelief among the families of Stop Special Needs Vouchers soon became determination, as parents mobilized to call the members of the Senate HELP Committee and encourage them to block the DeVos confirmation.

Nancy Gapinski posted a photo of her 9-year-old son Ben who has an IEP in the Glendale-River Hills School District, playing bass at his first orchestra concert this week, with a plea to family and friends. “As a parent of a child with autism,” she wrote, “I am begging all of you to call your senators to say that you oppose Ms. DeVos’ appointment. If you care about my son at all, call today.” Without the services provided under the IDEA, she points out, her son’s success as a member of the school orchestra would have been no better than an unattainable dream. She adds, “I worry about a future in which the Department of Education’s leader does not know about federal protections under the IDEA, or seem to care that a consequence of federal dollars going to private schools without any rules or regulations is that children with disabilities are discriminated against and under-served.”

For parents of students with disabilities across the state, the rights and protections of the IDEA are worth fighting for. The families of Stop Special Needs Vouchers will not stand quietly by for the confirmation of a Secretary of Education who either does not understand or does not value the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and everything it means for our children.

For more information on Stop Special Needs Vouchers, a parent-led statewide grassroots group, see:
Facebook page -- <https://www.facebook.com/StopSpecialNeedsVouchers>
Web site -- <http://www.stopspecialneeds vouchers.org>

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Stop Special Needs Vouchers is comprised of Wisconsin families committed to quality inclusive public education and to stopping harmful special needs vouchers.