

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The Office for Civil Rights within the Department of Education provides an invaluable service to students nationwide, protecting their equal access to education by enforcing civil rights laws and protections. To protect the fundamental right to a safe and secure education, we urge the committee to include full funding for the Office for Civil Rights, President Biden's request for \$162.4 million, a 22% increase compared to the FY24 enacted funding level.

Lawyers and staff at the Office for Civil Rights are responsible for investigating complaints of discrimination brought by students who feel discriminated against by schools based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age. They also develop regulations and policy guidance to support these protections and provide technical assistance to schools attempting to protect their students' rights.

The Office for Civil Rights also administers the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), a biennial survey of early education and K-12 local education agencies and schools on enforcing civil rights protections in their districts. The data collected through the CRDC informs the investigation and enforcement work OCR conducts when it receives specific complaints from students and the regulations and guidance that the Department of Education promulgates. This data is critical to help the Department of Education, and lawmakers understand trends in discrimination and the work that must be prioritized to ensure a safe learning environment for all students.¹

The Office for Civil Rights provides a much-needed backstop when state and local education agencies are unable or unwilling to protect their students, and robust funding for their work is more critical than ever. In 2023, the OCR received over nineteen thousand individual complaints from students who alleged discriminatory treatment by their publicly funded schools - this broke their 2022 record and is more than double the number of complaints received in 2021.² At the same time, the OCR is underfunded and understaffed. As of 2023, the office had eighteen percent fewer staff than in 2016.³


¹ U.S. Department of Education. "About OCR." *U.S. Department of Education*, U.S. Department of Education, 24 May 2023, www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/aboutocr.html.


² Modan, Naaz. "Federal Discrimination Complaints Continued Upswing in 2023 with No Signs of Slowing." *K-12 Dive*, Industry Dive, 22 Feb. 2024, www.k12dive.com/news/discrimination-complaints-increased-again-in-2023-no-signs-of-slowing-in-2/708187/#:~:text=down%20this%20year.-.


³ Quilantan, Bianca. "'We Need a Strong OCR': Advocates Press for Civil Rights Funding." *Politico*, Politico, 20 June 2023, www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-education/2023/06/20/we-need-a-strong-ocr-advocates-press-for-civil-rights-funding-00102618.


We have a responsibility to protect all students' right to access a safe, educational environment free of discrimination. We appreciate your hard work and leadership and request full funding for the Office for Civil Rights in the FY25 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.


Sincerely,


Sean Casten
Member of Congress


Summer Lee
Member of Congress

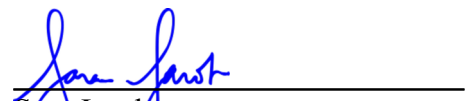

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress

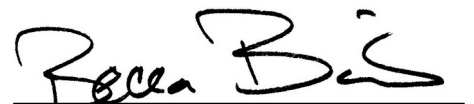

Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress


Katie Porter
Member of Congress


Sheria Jackson Lee
Member of Congress


Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress


Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

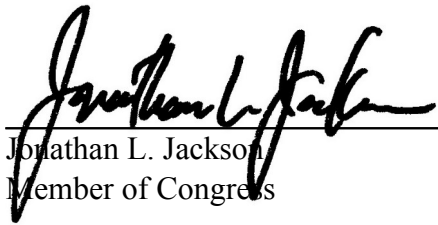

Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



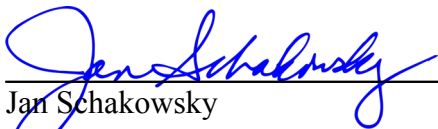
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



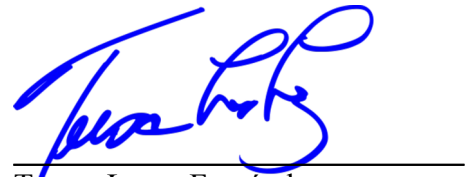
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



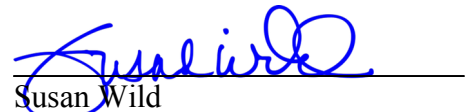
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



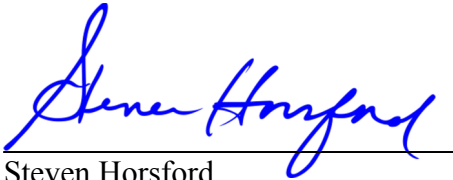
Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



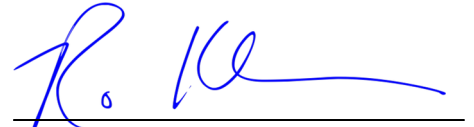
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Susan Wild
Member of Congress



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



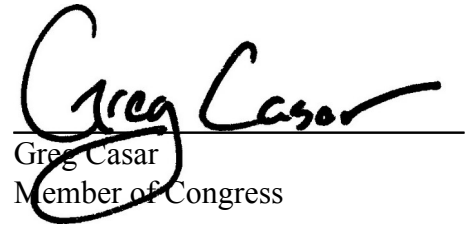
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



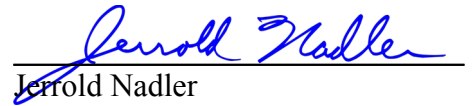
André Carson
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress