



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director

Isabel P. Dunst, Chair
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

202.387.2800 Fax: 202.667.9070 E-mail: rac@rac.org

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
at Kivie Kaplan Way
Washington, DC 20036

Visit our website at www.rac.org

August 4, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

On behalf of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, I write to express our steadfast support for Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Dear Colleague Letter of 2011 that guided academic institutions' responses to reports of sexual violence in schools.

Our Jewish tradition's moral obligation to prevent individuals from experiencing violence is clear and inspires our support for Title IX and other efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence in educational institutions. Sexual assault defies the holiness of every individual. Our tradition teaches that mental anguish and moral degradation are the equivalent of physical murder, and even earliest Jewish law and Rabbis consider rape to be so as well (Sanhedrin 73a). The sanctity of human life is one of the core principles of our value system.

All people, regardless of gender, can become the victims or perpetrators of sexual violence. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that 20 percent of high school girls, 20 percent of women undergraduates, and one in sixteen undergraduate men are the victims of completed or attempted acts of sexual violence. Each of these are individuals whose ability to complete their education is impeded by violence, harassment and discrimination. The Department of Education has an obligation to ensure the rights under Title IX of all students to prevent further harm.

For these reasons, we urge you to maintain current Title IX guidance and rigorous enforcement of the law as it pertains to instances of sexual violence. Since the issuance of the guidance, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has resolved 69 investigations of schools' handling of sexual assault reports, many of which resulted in compliance reviews and agreements to improve policy. There are still 350 schools under investigation. It is clear that a robust investigation mechanism - as well as one that rigorously prioritizes the well-being of students and a safe campus environment - remains necessary, and curtailing of the Department of Education's attention to this vital issue is inappropriate.



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.





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We ask that you affirm the Department of Education's commitment to upholding measures outlined in the 2011 guidance and Title IX. Any changes or revocation would disrupt years of progress toward ensuring accountability for academic institutions, without easing the process for the survivors or accused students. The safety of students must remain a priority for the Department of Education under your leadership.

Sincerely,

Isabel P. "Liz" Dunst, Chair



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