



January 29, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of America Forward and the more than 100 innovative, high-impact organizations across the country that make up the America Forward Coalition -- and that are working to solve some of our most pressing challenges in education, workforce development, and poverty alleviation -- I write to offer our support for the nomination of Connecticut Education Commissioner Dr. Miguel Cardona to serve as the next U.S. Secretary of Education.

Dr. Cardona's personal and professional experience make him uniquely qualified to lead the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Cardona, the son of Puerto Rican parents and a first-generation college graduate who grew up in public housing, understands first-hand the power of educational opportunity. As an English language learner, whose parents spoke a language other than English at home, Dr. Cardona shares a personal understanding with the growing English language learner student population nationwide. And he has consistently broken barriers, rising from an elementary school teacher, principal, and eventually assistant superintendent in his hometown district of Meriden to become Connecticut's first Latinx Commissioner of Education.

Dr. Cardona's long career as a public school educator grounds his leadership and expertise in the classroom, and equips him with invaluable perspective: he brings with him to the Secretary position the proximate voices of the many teachers, school leaders, families, and students he worked alongside throughout his career. In addition, over the past year, he has helped to navigate Connecticut's education system during the coronavirus pandemic, an experience that will be critically important as he leads our nation's public schools through one of the most trying times in our history.

We are excited about the prospect of working alongside Dr. Cardona on the pressing issues facing our students, families, educators, and communities. The work of America Forward Coalition organizations across the country provides a strong foundation of innovative, evidence-based approaches to improving outcomes for students, engaging families, supporting

educators, and more. We are eager to share these lessons in support of Dr. Cardona and the Department's efforts to strengthen our nation's education system, especially as we respond to and recover from the pandemic. We know that our actions must be grounded in equity, innovation, and a holistic understanding of the whole learner, and we believe that, today, we have a unique opportunity to build a more equitable and accessible education system -- from early learning to higher education and beyond.

While the challenges we face are complex, we have no doubt that Dr. Cardona and his team have the ability to meet them. The past year in America has been defined by unprecedented hardship, enormous loss, and our continued struggle to confront deeply entrenched, systemic injustice and inequity; however, we now have the chance to work collaboratively towards policies that expand access, embrace innovation, leverage science and evidence, and meaningfully advance equity for all people, everywhere.

Given this, we urge you to quickly consider and confirm Dr. Cardona as the next United States Secretary of Education. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our views, and we look forward to continuing our work together to advance the opportunities for all of our students and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Smolover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deborah" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Smolover".

Deborah Smolover
Executive Director

About America Forward

America Forward is the Washington, D.C.-based nonpartisan policy initiative of New Profit, a pioneering national venture philanthropy organization that invests in a portfolio of breakthrough social entrepreneurs and systems-change initiatives, catalyzes and builds their impact, and transforms how government and philanthropy pursue social change to ensure that all people can thrive.

America Forward unites social innovators with policymakers to advance a public policy agenda that advances equity, fosters innovation, rewards results, catalyzes cross-sector partnerships, and transforms local impact into national change. The America Forward Coalition comprises a network of over 100 social innovation organizations that champion innovative, effective, and efficient solutions to our country's most pressing social problems. Since 2007, our Coalition organizations have successfully advocated for lasting policy change in education, workforce development, and Pay for Success policy; leveraged \$1.7 billion for social innovation; and driven millions of federal resources toward programs that are achieving measurable results for those who need them most.