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April 29, 2010

The Honorable Jan Brewer
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Governor Brewer:

On behalf of the 3.2 million members of the National Education Association, including more than 34,000 members of the Arizona Education Association, we are writing to express our strong concerns on the passage of Senate Bill 1070.

Arizona is not the only state struggling with the complex and divisive issue of illegal immigration. Lawmakers in many states have long been frustrated and impatient about the gridlock in Washington, D.C. over comprehensive immigration reform. Yet public schools don't operate in a vacuum. They often feel the reverberations from government's attempts to "solve" intricate and thorny social issues. Consequently, our members fear the impact of this law on their students, parents, and schools.

One aspect left unaddressed by this law is the degree to which it will require teachers and education support professionals to act as immigration agents and question people if there's reasonable suspicion that they're undocumented. School employees are not substitutes for INS agents, and expecting them to make such judgments would force them to act in ways fundamentally at odds with their roles as educators. It will also quickly erode their trusted and carefully cultivated relationships with parents and members of the community.

Educators will now face a new set of challenges that will dramatically alter how they interact with students' families. This law will cause undocumented immigrants to be fearful of law enforcement and by extension, to fear school officials and other public employees. As a result, the law will have a chilling effect on all students – documented and undocumented. The net effect will be to drive undocumented parents and students deeper into the shadows, creating a climate of fear, repression, and intimidation.

Public schools strive to be places where children can feel safe and parents can feel comfortable sending their children every day. Our message is simple: We're about education—any child or parent who walks through our doors is welcome. We urge you to ensure that the education of children in Arizona is not compromised by this legislation.

We thank you for your consideration of our views on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis Van Roekel".

Dennis Van Roekel
President

cc: The Honorable Robert Burns, President, Arizona State Senate
The Honorable Kirk Adams, Speaker, Arizona House of Representatives
John Wright, President, Arizona Education Association