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July 22, 2026

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we urge you to VOTE NO on advancing the nomination of Keith Sonderling as Secretary of Labor. Votes on this issue may be included in NEA's report card for the 119th Congress.

Sonderling has been an active participant in the Trump administration's illegal effort to dismantle the Department of Education (ED) piece by piece—moving programs and functions to other federal agencies that have neither the knowledge nor the expertise necessary to administer them as Congress intended. It has not gone smoothly.

Last year, for example, parts of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) were transferred from ED to the Department of Labor (DOL)—a change that necessitated using two systems instead of one to manage roughly \$2 billion in grants, which greatly complicated the process for states and grantees. Some states did not have full access to funds until December 2025, a significant delay that resonated across states and school districts. Small districts in rural areas were hit especially hard.

Complex education programs that help kindergarteners and other elementary school students are going to DOL. Yet Sonderling lacks basic knowledge of core programs. At his confirmation hearing, he displayed profound ignorance of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). He also said that DOL's role would be limited to providing "services" and that ED experts would actually be running the programs. But few such experts remain—a combination of reductions-in-force, buyouts, and early retirements has stripped ED of nearly half its staff, and more have resigned.

Despite DOL's expertise in supporting wage earners and job seekers, Sonderling ignores what is now their main concern: affordability. In May, for example, his own Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the rate of inflation had risen to 4.2 percent, the highest level in three years. Yet he issued this official statement: "[American workers, families, and businesses are winning.](#)"

Most Americans would disagree—strenuously. Rising prices are crushing the workforce, straining our public schools, and forcing families to do more with less. Gasoline costs more than

\$4 a gallon. Higher fuel and fertilizer costs are ruining farmers, driving up food prices, and making groceries unaffordable.

As Acting Secretary, Sonderling abandoned legal defense of the 2024 overtime rule, then formally rescinded it—closing the door on time-and-a-half pay for some 4 million workers and locking the salary threshold at \$35,568. Now, he is advancing two anti-labor proposed rules: one would strip workers of minimum wages, overtime pay, family and medical leave, and other protections; the other would shield corporations from liability for wage theft and child labor violations.

Under Acting Secretary Sonderling, the Department of Labor has repeatedly violated the collective bargaining rights it should be defending—for example, by ignoring the four months' notice requirement of its own union contract. Sonderling stood by when the Trump administration stripped collective bargaining rights from more than a million federal workers, including educators in schools administered by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) who are represented by NEA's affiliate, the Federal Education Association.

Sonderling also stood by as DOGE erased DOL's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), a civil rights and equal opportunity enforcement agency that pre-dated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Please VOTE NO on advancing Keith Sonderling's nomination as Secretary of Labor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly Johnson Trinca', written in a cursive style.

Kimberly Johnson Trinca
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association