

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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January 7, 2022

President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear President Biden:

On January 21, 2021, you issued Executive Order 14000 stating, “it is the policy of [my] Administration to provide support...for safe, in-person learning as quickly as possible.”¹ On January 4, 2022, you stated, “[w]e know that our kids can be safe when in school...That’s why I believe schools should remain open. They have what they need.”² On January 5, 2022, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki doubled down on your Administration’s commitment to maintain in-person learning stating, “we want schools to be open, the President wants them to be open and we’re going to continue to use every resource and work to ensure that’s the case.”³ Unfortunately, many Teachers Unions across the country disagree with you and are actively undermining in-person education. It is unclear if you are willing to stand by your statements, stand up to the Unions, and advocate for America’s children. We insist you do so.

Teachers Unions have repeatedly jeopardized America’s children’s education and livelihoods throughout this pandemic. Even as teachers were prioritized for vaccines, many refused to return to in-person instruction.⁴ Even worse, classes for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) were abruptly cancelled on Wednesday January 5, 2022 after the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) voted to cancel in-person learning and refused to show up to work, despite no scientific basis for their decision.⁵ Dr. Leana Wen, a professor of public health at George Washington University, said, “schools remain one of the safest places for children from a #covid19 transmission standpoint.”⁶ Vaccines are widely available for anyone over five years of age who wants one and \$190 billion was allocated to reopen schools safely.⁷ There is absolutely no reason for students to be forced to learn virtually.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14000, 86 F.R. 7215 (Jan. 26, 2021).

² Morgan Chalfant, *Biden: Schools should stay open despite omicron wave*, THE HILL (Jan. 5, 2022).

³ Nick Niedzwiedek, *Psaki: Schools can open safely 'including in Chicago'*, POLITICO (Jan. 5, 2022).

⁴ *Joe Biden sacrifices children to the teachers unions*, THE WASH. EXAMINER (Jan. 28, 2021).

⁵ Tracy Swartz, *et.al.*, *CPS classes canceled Wednesday after Chicago Teachers Union votes to refuse in-person schooling*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE (Jan. 4, 2022).

⁶ Leana Wen, M.D. (@DrLeanaWen), Twitter (Jan. 4, 2022, 10:22 p.m.).

⁷ Annie Waldman & Bianca Fortis, *The Federal Government Gave Billions to America’s Schools for COVID-19 Relief. Where Did the Money Go?*, PROPUBLICA (Oct. 20, 2021).

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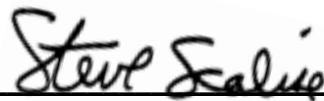
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Student learning loss due to remote or hybrid learning is astronomical—failing grades are rising and child suicide rates are surging.⁸ Among third through eighth graders, math and reading levels were all lower than normal this fall.⁹ The gaps were largest for Black and Hispanic students, and schools with high poverty rates.¹⁰ Children and teenagers are experiencing a mental health crisis of historic proportions—in fact, your own Surgeon General agrees and the American Academy of Pediatrics declared a national state of emergency in children’s mental health.¹¹ Suicide attempts have risen sharply for adolescents with suicide attempts by 12 to 17 year old girls rising 51 percent from early 2019 to early 2021.¹² These unnecessary disruptions from the CTU pose additional risks to children’s mental health, learning, and social relationships.

We agree that schools should remain open and with Press Secretary Psaki’s statement that we should “ensure that children are not enduring the mental health impact of not being in school, that there are not gaps in learning. This includes schools everywhere, including in Chicago.”¹³ Talk is cheap unless it is backed up with strong, decisive action. It is imperative that you do everything in your power to ensure students are learning in-person so they can begin to make up all that they have lost throughout this pandemic. We stand ready to assist the Administration in any way we can to ensure our students can learn in-person.

Sincerely,



Steve J. Scalise

Ranking Member

Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

cc: The Honorable James E. Clyburn, Chairman
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

⁸ Michelle Goldberg, *Democrats Desperately need Schools to Get Back to Normal*, THE N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 11, 2021).

⁹ David Leonhardt, *Good morning. The pandemic has created a crisis for American children*, THE N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 4, 2022).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*; Press Release, U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic, U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human Servs. (Dec. 7, 2021).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Nick Niedzwiedek, *Psaki: Schools can open safely 'including in Chicago'*, POLITICO (Jan. 5, 2022).