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The Honorable Brad R. Wenstrup
Chairman
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515-3502

The Honorable Raul Ruiz
Ranking Member
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic

Re: December 4 Markup of Majority Report

Dear Chairman Wenstrup and Ranking Member Ruiz:

We submit this letter on behalf of the American Federation of Teachers (“AFT”) in connection with the Select Subcommittee’s scheduled December 4 markup of its report entitled, “After Action Review of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Lessons Learned and a Path Forward,” (“Majority Report”), released publicly on December 2. On behalf of the AFT, we released on December 2 a 37-page response to the Subcommittee Majority’s school closures chapter, refuting the Majority’s false claims about the AFT. [AFT Response](#). We respectfully submit this letter to make two important points.

First, for the last two years, the Select Subcommittee Majority has fixated on the idea that the AFT had uncommon access and inappropriate influence on the February 2021 CDC guidance. In addition, it has relentlessly pursued the false claim that the AFT wanted to keep schools closed during the pandemic. Instead of a broad-gauged and constructive review of school closures during the pandemic, its work has devolved into an extended effort to demonize and scapegoat educators and their unions – including most notably, the AFT and its president, Randi Weingarten.

The Select Subcommittee Majority inherited – and has attempted to advance – a theme first advanced by Republican leadership more than three years ago, when Rep. Steve Scalise alleged that the CDC had amended its school reopening guidance, under pressure from the AFT, to ensure that more schools would remain closed for a longer period of time. This allegation was utterly false. These claims were embellished and expanded by a March 2022 GOP staff report asserting that the AFT had enjoyed “uncommon access” to a draft of the CDC’s document on school opening in early 2021 because it was a “political union” that supported President Biden and Democratic candidates. These claims of “uncommon access” and inappropriate influence were equally false. In fact, approximately 50 organizations were consulted by the CDC while developing its guidance. Moreover, the only two changes requested by the AFT and accepted by the CDC were changes that Chairman Wenstrup believed were appropriate. Importantly, the AFT’s recommendations to the CDC were drawn from its November 2020 blueprint to reopen schools, which had been released and covered by the press months earlier.

Second, the allegation that the AFT substantially influenced the CDC guidance document was always a pretext for the broader claim that the AFT’s agenda was to keep schools closed as long as possible. That claim is elaborated in the Select Subcommittee’s Report and ignores the overwhelming evidence that the AFT’s goals throughout the pandemic were to re-open schools safely, with appropriate safeguards to protect students, teachers, and their families. From the onset of the pandemic in February 2020, the AFT consistently acted to protect the health and wellbeing of this nation’s students, families, educators, health care personnel, and public employees. Its actions included fighting for resources to keep families fed, providing Wi-Fi to families needing tools to communicate, purchasing personal protective equipment, and advocating for the tools and conditions for safe in-person learning.

The Select Subcommittee Majority completely ignores near monthly public recommendations by Ms. Weingarten and the AFT in 2020 and 2021 to resume in-person learning, and a prominent \$5 million “Back to School for Everyone” national campaign, headlined by a May 2021 address by Ms. Weingarten, in which she concluded, “There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week.”

In a telling sign of the lack of evidence for the Majority’s claim that “AFT continually pushed for school closures throughout the pandemic,”¹ the Majority’s draft of the school closures chapter, shared with counsel for the AFT, had a footnote – left blank in the draft – that was presumably placed there for the purpose of providing documentary support for this claim with evidence. By the time the Majority report was

¹ Majority Report at 416.

released on December 2, the pretense of evidence to support that claim had been dropped – there is no footnote. There is no footnote because there is no evidence.

Most disturbingly, the school closures chapter of the Majority Report contains not one word about what should be done to ameliorate the damage caused by the pandemic. From the beginning, the AFT has made clear that it welcomed joining the Select Subcommittee in a good-faith effort to try to learn lessons from the bitter experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and support initiatives designed to address the enduring harms it caused. That would include addressing student learning loss and loneliness, promoting literacy, investing in immersive tutoring, and other initiatives that the AFT has supported. Unfortunately, the Select Subcommittee has utterly failed to do so. Its work on this issue is a colossal missed opportunity.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this letter for the record.

Respectfully submitted,



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Counsel for the American Federation of Teachers

cc: The Honorable James Comer
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