

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We write to express strong disapproval of President Joseph Biden's Path Out of the Pandemic COVID-19 Action Plan's suggestion that vaccinations should be required for students in K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions. And while we appreciate the Biden Administration's plan to make vaccines widely available to children ages 5-11 pending its Emergency Use Authorization, we want to make clear that the federal government should not mandate this vaccine for children.

Though we share your and the President's desire to ensure that all school children are learning in a safe and healthy environment, we see no reason for the federal government to insert itself in the middle of this contentious issue. The Arkansas State Legislature, the Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Health, and the many school boards, parents, and teachers throughout the state are more than capable of working together to make the right decisions for Arkansas' students.

In fact, Arkansas has been navigating the complex issue of COVID-19 in our schools with confidence and success for over a year. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Arkansas has prioritized a safe reopening of schools while maintaining individual freedom, protecting parental rights, and ensuring patient privacy. Students have suffered greatly during the pandemic – we should not disrupt their lives, families, and education further with a federal vaccination mandate when one is not necessary.

The State of Arkansas, and Governor Asa Hutchinson, have ensured vaccinations are easily accessible for those who desire one, and can determine what requirements, if any, are necessary to keep students safe and schools open. COVID-19 vaccination status is private health information, and an individual should not be compelled by the federal government to divulge their status. Furthermore, students and teachers can wear masks, face shields, and social distance should they feel additional protective measures are necessary.

We continue encouraging Arkansans to speak with their doctors about the vaccine, which came about through President Donald J. Trump's Operation Warp Speed initiative. But it is an unnecessary overreach for the federal government to dictate vaccination guidelines that are more appropriately determined by the state in consultation with parents and local school officials.

We look forward to hearing from you on your plans to protect individual liberty, the rights of states to make their own school health and safety laws, and patient privacy in the school setting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Westerman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bruce" and last name "Westerman" clearly legible.

Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress
Arkansas' Fourth District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Womack". The signature is cursive, with "Steve" and "Womack" written in a connected style.

Steve Womack
Member of Congress
Arkansas' Third District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. French Hill". The signature is cursive, with "J. French" and "Hill" written in a connected style.

J. French Hill
Member of Congress
Arkansas' Second District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric A. 'Rick' Crawford". The signature is cursive, with "Eric A." and "Crawford" written in a connected style, and "Rick" in quotes.

Eric A. "Rick" Crawford
Member of Congress
Arkansas' First District