

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2019

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We write to express concerns that federally-funded Middle East Studies National Resource Centers (NRCs) are misusing their Title VI grant funds. We appreciate the Department of Education's (Department) growing attention to this matter, specifically with the Department's recent notice regarding the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies' (CMES) potential misuse of Title VI funds¹. It is important that the Department maintain oversight of grantees to ensure that Title VI-funded NRCs are utilizing taxpayer dollars in accordance with the law, as written by Congress.

Title VI of the Higher Education Act (HEA) was created by Congress to increase the number of graduates with international and foreign language expertise and knowledge to address needs in national security, stability, and economic vitality. The purpose of Title VI-funded NRCs includes promoting "access to research and training overseas, including through linkages with overseas institutions"². Unfortunately, certain actions taken by several directors and faculty of Middle East Studies NRCs are contradictory to the statutory purposes of Title VI.

Numerous directors and faculty of Title VI-funded Middle East Studies NRCs have endorsed an academic boycott of Israel. In a coalition letter sent to you last year, concerned organizations highlighted that two current directors of Title VI-funded Middle East Studies NRCs called for an end to their schools' study abroad program in Israel³. Were these directors and faculty members to succeed in implementing an academic boycott under a Title VI-funded program, it would be in clear violation of the statutory purposes of Title VI. According to the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel's (PACBI) guidelines for the international academic boycott of Israel, "all Israeli academic institutions, unless proven otherwise, are subject to boycott" and "projects with all Israeli academic institutions should come to an end"⁴. PACBI guidelines consider certain activities to be in violation of an academic boycott, which include but are not limited to⁵:

- Academic events, such as conferences, panels, workshops, etc. involving Israel or Israeli institutions.
- Research and development activities among Israeli academic institutions, the Israeli government, and corporations that are either Israeli or involved in contracts with Israeli institutions.
- Addresses, talks, and debates at international venues that involve Israeli state officials or representatives of Israeli academic institutions.

- Study abroad programs at Israeli universities—including writing recommendations for students hoping to pursue studies in Israel.
- International students enrolling in or international faculty teaching or conducting research at degree or non-degree programs at an Israeli institution.
- Academic visits or fact-finding missions that receive funding from Israel, its institutions and lobbying groups.
- Normalization projects, such as those that pose parity between Israelis and Palestinians and/or Arabs, bring together Palestinians and/or Arabs and Israelis so they can present their respective narratives or perspectives, or that work toward reconciliation.
- Publishing in or referencing articles in academic journals based at Israeli universities or published in collaboration with Israeli institutions or granting permission to reprint material published elsewhere in such Israel-based journals.

Based on the above guidelines, academic boycotts of Israel defy the statutory purposes of Title VI programs. Directors, faculty and staff of Title VI-funded NRCs should not be permitted to implement an academic boycott of any country under their purview.

It is the Department's responsibility to ensure that taxpayer-funded NRCs are implementing programs in good faith with the statutory purposes and requirements of Title VI. We encourage the Department to continue robust oversight efforts of NRCs' compliance with Title VI. In addition, we strongly urge the Department to take proactive actions to ensure that future NRC grantees make verifiable assurances that their programs or centers, along with their directors, faculty and staff comply with the statutory purposes and requirements of Title VI. The Department should use its authority under Title VI⁶ to enhance grant application requirements for these programs and centers, including but not limited to requiring applicants to provide assurances that they will not implement an academic boycott of a country within their program or center's purview. We believe these actions will help restore the integrity of Title VI-funded NRCs.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Glenn Grothman
Member of Congress



Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress



Ron Wright
Member of Congress



Chuck Fleischmann
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



Mark Meadows
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



Randy Weber
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/17/2019-20067/notice-of-a-letter-regarding-the-duke-unc-consortium-for-middle-east-studies>

² 20 U.S.C. 1121.

³ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Coalition-letter-to-DeVos-11.13.18.pdf>

⁴ <https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/academic-boycott-guidelines>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 20 U.S.C. 1122.