**Survivor’s Reply to DeVos: I Refuse to Be Silenced**

Last Thursday, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos spoke at George Mason University, where she gave a speech outlining new policies of Title IX. DeVos threatens to rescind the 2011 Obama-Era policy that provided institutions of higher education a foundation of expectations and guidelines as to how cases of sexual assault and harassment should be dealt with. Written in 2011, these provisions became known as the “Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL), and expanded Title IX to include campus sexual violence as instances of gender discrimination, because any act of sexual violence - occurring to any student - compromises their educational experience. I am not here to convince anyone the DCL is essential to a survivor’s journey. Rather, I write to you as the co-president of k(no)w, Wooster’s anti-rape culture and sexual advocacy group that provides direct support to survivors of sexual misconduct. I also write this as a survivor myself. Tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of when I was raped on the College of Wooster campus.

Title IX is a gender equity law that reads, “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title IX protects those most likely to experience gender discrimination –mainly women and non-binary communities. The removal of the DCL threatens our national discourse and commitment to protecting survivors first.

Other activists have raised similar fears about rescinding previous Obama improvements. Fatima Graves criticized DeVos’ decision last Thursday as, “it signals a green light to sweep sexual assault further under the rug.” Similarly, activist Jess Davidson highlighted the exclusionary structure of DeVos’ addressment because “no survivor groups were invited to today’s decision… the fact that they’re not in the room is not reflective of who’s actually going to be impacted by the policy.” Both Graves’ and Davidson’s concerns are accurate; statements like, “Schools’ [have] responsibility to take immediate and effective steps to end sexual harassment and sexual violence” (DCL, 3) would be replaced with, “Every survivor of sexual misconduct must be taken seriously. Every student accused of sexual misconduct must know that guilt is not predetermined.” (DeVos, 9/7/17). And while that shift may not sound significant to you, what I hear as a survivor is, “you are being listened to, but…” When I hear, “but…” it serves as a constant reminder that my word isn’t good enough, and for me, to have my rape dismissed is just as damaging as the assault itself.

While I cannot guarantee what our national discourse on Title IX may be, I can contribute to the campus one, and I make this promise to survivors of sexual violence: k(no)w will always serve as a space that provides safety, support, and security to those working through the healing process of sexual misconduct. We promise to hear, advocate, and support you – regardless of what stage in the healing process you may be.