

Opening Statement of Lisa Brown
Nominee for General Counsel, U.S. Department of Education
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
July 13, 2021

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, it is my honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as General Counsel of the Department of Education. I am deeply appreciative of and humbled by President Biden and Secretary Cardona's trust in me. If confirmed, I will do my best to justify that trust.

I would like to thank the Committee for considering my nomination and for the opportunity to meet with members of your staff before this hearing.

I also want to thank my family, and especially my husband Kevin Cullen and our son Philip, for their love and support and their shared commitment to educational opportunities for all.

My parents believed that the most important thing they could give their three daughters was a good education. My father frequently told us that, with a quality education and hard work, we could do or be anything we wanted. My parents instilled in me not only a personal love of learning, but also a dedication to providing educational opportunities for others, as a teacher, board member and lawyer.

The American Dream – the promise of opportunity for those who work hard – depends upon a quality education. The ability to achieve that dream should not be limited to those with financial resources or living in certain zip codes. An excellent education should be available to everyone. This is only more urgent today, as we emerge from the COVID pandemic. The Department's role in supporting students whose academic progress and mental health have been deeply impacted, closing the widening achievement gap, and providing opportunity to adults reentering the workforce are of critical importance to the recovery of our Nation.

I believe the work of the Department's General Counsel is vital to that effort. Together with the over 100 career lawyers and other professionals in the Office of General Counsel, the General Counsel plays a critical role in advancing the Department's mission by providing sound legal advice and counsel to the Secretary and officials across the Department. The General Counsel's responsibilities include advising colleagues on faithful implementation and enforcement of the laws that Congress has enacted, and working with colleagues across the government to further the Department's mission. It is a position I have come to admire and respect over the course of my career.

After serving in a number of different legal positions, I found my calling in the role of in-house counsel. I was first introduced to the job when I served as Counsel to Vice President Gore and have spent the past eight and a half years as Vice President and General Counsel of Georgetown University. There is nothing better than helping a mission-driven organization to achieve its

goals while avoiding legal shoals. The opportunity to combine my two passions – public service and education – with my favorite job – by serving as General Counsel of the Department of Education is compelling to me.

I believe that my more than thirty years of experience working for the government, a Presidential transition team, a major university and a law firm has prepared me for this role. It has given me a broad and deep understanding of both how government works and the role of a general counsel. I understand the roles of each branch of government, and the distinction between policymaking and legal analysis. I have had the opportunity to work and advise on a wide range of legal matters, including litigation, financial transactions, ethics, investigations, regulatory matters and compliance, and am familiar with many of the legal issues that are within the Department's purview. I enjoy leading a team of expert lawyers, and would relish the opportunity to work with the excellent lawyers in the Department of Education's Office of General Counsel and across the government to give the American people the best representation possible guided by what the law and Constitution require.

If confirmed, I promise to do my best to provide sage advice and counsel to help the Department achieve its mission, so that every parent can tell their children, as my father told his three daughters, that if you work hard and earn a quality education, you can do anything you want. It would be an honor to serve as General Counsel of the Department of Education and to partner with you to provide students across the country with the best possible education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.