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United States Senate

September 15, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20020

Dear Secretary Cardona:

I write regarding the presence of children's private information and school data on 'Dark Web' pages. On September 10, 2021, NBC News reported that ransomware gangs have published data from thousands of American K-12 schools on the Dark Web.[1] The private information and school data distributed includes information about children's medical conditions and family financial statuses as well as Social Security numbers and birthdays. Some schools contacted about the data leaks apparently did not even know about the problem.

As a mother and grandmother, it is extremely distressing to learn about the victimization of any child through the publishing of their personally identifiable information on the Dark Web. There are accounts that children, possibly as young as 5 years old, have already been the victim of identity theft and other types of cybercrime.[2] Our Nation's most valuable treasure is our children, and their victimization by nefarious individuals utilizing the Dark Web is absolutely horrific.

Accordingly, I request to know the efforts being made by the United States Department of Education to ameliorate the threat to our nation's schools and school children posed by the ongoing publication of their personally identifiable information on the Dark Web. Given the particular vulnerability of children, I ask that you provide more information about the following by October 15, 2021:

- How and when did you learn of the data leaks of U.S. student information onto the Dark Web referenced in the NBC News report?
- How many children in total have been victimized by ransomware gangs publicizing their information on the Dark Web?
- When you learned of the data leaks, what steps did you take to inform the impacted schools and school districts?
- What actions will you take to help schools, school districts, and parents blunt the impact of these data leaks? For example, will parents have access to credit monitoring services?
- In general, if you learn of ransomware attacks from an impacted school or district, what steps do you take to help them mitigate the fallout from the incident?

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[1] https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/hackers-are-leaking-childrens-data-s-little-parents-can-rcna1926
[2] https://www.13abc.com/2021/02/22/toledo-public-school-students-seeing-effects-of-massive-data-breach

- What resources or guidance are you providing to schools and school districts who are interested in securing themselves against cyber threats?
- Is the education sector making cybersecurity a priority in the Biden administration? If not, why?

Sincerely,

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator