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April 21, 2017

The Honorable Hannah-Beth Jackson
Chair of the Senate Committee on Judiciary
State Capitol, Room 2187
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support SB 169 (Jackson & de León) – Gender Equity in Education

Dear Senator Jackson,

On behalf of the California Women's Law Center (CWLC), we are writing in strong support of Senate Bill 169, which would amend the Education Code to codify existing Title IX protections into California law and help ensure safety and equity on our school campuses.

Sexual harassment and sexual assault severely affect a student's right to pursue and receive an education in a safe, non-discriminatory environment. The civil rights enshrined in Title IX and its implementing regulations have been an important tool to make California's campuses safer for students. With the strong and focused support of the previous presidential administration and state lawmakers, student advocates have proactively asserted Title IX protections and school administrators have implemented enhanced response policies and prevention initiatives.

The new presidential administration has signaled hostility toward Title IX and the underlying nature of gender-based violence and harassment. The current federal standards codified in statutes and regulations, or established by case law, are in many cases stronger than those presently in place in California. In 2011, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a detailed guidance document (the "Dear Colleague" letter) clarifying the application of Title IX as applied to sexual assault and harassment in schools. It defines what qualifies as sexual harassment and reminds schools that sexual assault is a form of sexual harassment that schools have a duty to protect students against and respond to effectively. SB 169 would codify the crucial standards set forth in the Dear Colleague letter into California law and thus ensure that strong state-level protections remain, should federal protections be undermined, amended, or repealed.

CWLC's mission is to advance the potential of women and girls through transformative litigation, policy advocacy, and education. CWLC is committed to ensuring that our campuses are safe from discriminatory sexual harassment and sexual assault. No girl's education or future should be threatened because of an unsafe campus.

For these reasons, the California Women's Law Center strongly supports SB 169.

Sincerely,

Betsy Butler
Executive Director

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