



Will Hild
8300 Boone Boulevard Suite 500
Vienna, VA 22182
P: (202) 898 - 0542
info@consumersresearch.org

June 11, 2026

The Honorable Keith Sonderling
Acting Secretary of Labor
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Acting Secretary Sonderling,

I am writing to respectfully request that the Department of Labor review whether politically motivated investment activism being encouraged by leadership of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) may conflict with the fiduciary obligations owed by pension trustees to teachers and retirees.

Public pension fiduciaries are entrusted with protecting the retirement security of millions of educators. Those responsibilities require trustees to act solely in the financial interests of beneficiaries without regard to political, ideological, or institutional objectives.

Although the AFT does not formally control teacher pension systems, the union openly acknowledges that it actively works to influence pension trustees and investment managers through its Trustee Council and related advocacy efforts. According to AFT materials, more than 50 AFT-affiliated trustees serve on 27 public pension funds, including several of the nation's largest teacher retirement systems.

The AFT further states that it provides trustees with reports and guidance intended to influence investment decisions involving companies the union considers politically controversial. These activities raise serious concerns about whether union leadership is encouraging trustees to pursue political activism, despite such mixed motives being prohibited by their fiduciary obligations to retirees.

Specifically, AFT and its president, Randi Weingarten, have publicly advocated for or supported:

- pressure campaigns targeting firearm manufacturers;
- efforts aimed at private prison and immigrant detention companies;
- fossil fuel divestment initiatives;
- heightened scrutiny and potential reconsideration of investments involving Tesla and SpaceX;
- consumer boycotts against Target over political disagreements regarding DEI policies; and
- threats of divestment from GM and Stellantis during labor negotiations unless union demands were met.

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These actions would conflict with the duty of loyalty owed to pension beneficiaries because pension systems may simultaneously hold investments in the very companies being targeted. If pension trustees are using retirement assets, proxy authority, shareholder influence, or divestment threats to advance political objectives, labor leverage, or ideological campaigns, such conduct may undermine the exclusive-benefit principle that forms the foundation of fiduciary law because it includes motives other than maximizing returns for beneficiaries.

Of particular concern is the contradiction created when union leadership encourages teachers and trustees to economically pressure companies that may also be generating returns for teacher retirement systems. Pension beneficiaries should not bear financial risk resulting from politically motivated activism unrelated to investment performance.

I respectfully request that the Department review:

1. whether political or ideological considerations are influencing investment stewardship decisions involving teacher pension systems;
2. whether beneficiaries are receiving adequate transparency regarding politically motivated shareholder activism or divestment campaigns;
3. whether conflicts exist between union institutional objectives and fiduciary obligations owed to retirees; and
4. whether additional guidance or oversight is warranted regarding the use of pension assets and shareholder influence for non-financial purposes.

Teachers and retirees deserve confidence that their retirement systems are being managed exclusively for their financial benefit and not as instruments to push a political agenda.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your service.

Sincerely,

Will Hild

Will Hild
Executive Director

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