



July 18, 2021

Governor Bill Lee  
Tennessee State Capitol, 1st Floor  
600 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37243

RE: Response to Larry Arnn's Comments and Defending Tennessee Teachers

Dear Governor Lee,

A few weeks ago, Tennessee teachers and community stakeholders witnessed the reprehensible conversation between you and Larry Arnn of the private conservative college Hillsdale College. Since then, there has been no recant of the statements and no apology to Tennessee teachers. This situation is deplorable.

In the past two years, teachers navigated a global pandemic, witnessed racial violence and terrorism, and more recently grappled with the reality of yet another school shooting that claimed the lives of 2 teachers and 19 children, all while working in some of the most challenging conditions (i.e. limited resources, wages beneath the cost of living, and staff shortages) to support our most vulnerable assets — our students. Yet, teachers continue to show up and persist with love and integrity despite not being uplifted by their governor in a pivotal moment. Teachers have been the lifeblood of our communities and for students around the nation, and across our state in Tennessee. Our teachers do not deserve to be undermined and disregarded. Tennessee's teachers are not disposable.

My time spent in the classroom offered me some of the most rewarding experiences I've had professionally, but also some of the hardest. There's no truth in the statement that just "anyone" can be a teacher. Sadly, that's the problem; misconceptions persist of all the things that teachers do and the challenges they encounter. You chose silence and offered nothing in rebuttal, push back, or defense of Tennessee teachers against Arnn's ignorant comments. In many regards, that makes you an accomplice to those sentiments. As the old adage goes, "Tell me your friends, and I'll tell you who you are."

In order to rectify this, there are two things that must happen immediately:

1. A public apology must be issued that denounces Arnn's comments and defends Tennessee teachers.
2. A complete removal of Mr. Arnn as an education advisor and a halt to partnerships between Tennessee public schools and Hillsdale College.

We appreciate and value Tennessee educators, past, present, and future; they deserve better in this moment from our leaders. Our organization offers them encouragement, reassurance, and support. Teachers are leaders in their communities and in their schools, and must be valued at the highest level for the professionals that they are. In the past, you have praised the importance and significance of Tennessee teachers; in this moment we urge you to stay committed and true to those comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Diarese George". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dr. Diarese George  
Executive Director, TECA