

ABBIE GROFF-BLASZAK



DEMOCRAT FOR STATE SENATE

NEWS RELEASE

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Candidate Abbie Groff-Blaszak Target of Insidious Dark Money Attack Mailer

Grand Rapids, MI — A dark-money-funded attack mailer hit mailboxes across State Senate District 29 late last week showing composited pictures of Democratic Primary Candidate Abbie Groff-Blaszak alongside President Donald Trump and former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos under the headline, “Don’t let Betsy DeVos pick our next state senator.”

The ad is paid for by a dark money political PAC named “Michigan Deserves Better.” The group is organized as a 501(c)(4), which means that they are not required to disclose their financial donors. The President of “Michigan Deserves Better” is a Lansing-based political operative named Joe DiSano, who is a frequent contributor to the various campaign and political committees of Groff-Blaszak’s Democratic Primary opponent, State Representative Phil Skaggs. The “Michigan Deserves Better” dark money PAC has a history of sending highly targeted, aggressive and misleading mailers in tightly contested primaries and local elections. DiSano has faced legal action for slander in the past and been banned from at least one social media platform as a result of his tactics.

In the attack mailer, Groff-Blaszak is accused of being “bankrolled for years by DeVos money while they attacked our public schools and helped elect Trump.” Groff-Blaszak, a career educator, served as the Director of the West Michigan Leadership Academy (WMLA), a place-based program of a national nonprofit, The Leadership Academy, from 2017-2021. WMLA was supported by a number of revenue streams, including the Steelcase Foundation and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation. The program provided racial-equity-focused leadership coaching and professional learning for school and district leaders across the Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, Godfrey-Lee and Godwin Heights Public School Districts.

In 2021, The DeVos foundation demanded that WMLA change its program language and elements to eliminate content related to anti-racism, cultural responsiveness and racial equity amidst the cultural uproar over critical race theory. Groff-Blaszak refused to capitulate. When

the Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation pulled its funding as a result, she resigned as the program's director to allow the program to keep its remaining commitments to the local school districts.

"I think it's important to be clear about both the story and the intent behind this absurd mailer," says Groff-Blaszak. "The story is part of a larger issue in West Michigan and across the country: nonprofits are often funded by billionaire family and corporate foundations. Nonprofit leaders grapple with that tension every day as they work to meet the essential needs of our communities. In the Michigan that I believe in and am working toward, our friends and neighbors will not have to depend on the benevolence or worldview of people who unfairly benefit from the current system in order to have basic needs met.

"In addition, the intent of this smear ad is standard practice for career politicians who are willing to sacrifice the trust of their communities to hold onto power through misinformation, manipulation, and closed-door machinations.

"Folks are tired of politics and systems that protect the powerful while asking everyone else to make do. I know that our community is ready for leadership grounded in integrity, transparency, and courage and focused on working to create a Michigan where everyone can thrive."

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About Abbie Groff-Blaszak

Abbie Groff-Blaszak is a public servant, educator, and community leader with over two decades of experience serving Michigan. She is running for Michigan State Senate District 29 to bring honest, courageous and effective leadership to Lansing and to deliver progress that improves daily life for working families. Learn more at <https://www.abbieforsenate.com/>.