

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 6, 2016

Ms. Molly Corbett Broad
President
American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dr. Walter Bumphus
President and CEO
American Association of Community
Colleges
One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036

Dr. Muriel Howard
President
American Association of State Colleges and
Universities
1307 New York Avenue NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dr. Mary Sue Coleman
President
Association of American Universities
1200 New York Avenue NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20005

Mr. Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant
Universities
1307 New York Avenue NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

Dr. David Warren
President
National Association of Independent Colleges
and Universities
1025 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ms. Broad, Dr. Bumphus, Dr. Howard, Dr. Coleman, Mr. McPherson, and Dr. Warren:

Nearly one year ago, many of us sent a letter to then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan urging him to utilize the Department's authority under the Higher Education Act to take a critical step toward making it easier for more students to access federal financial aid and obtain a higher education. We were pleased when President Obama announced last year that that U.S. Department of Education would take this step and allow students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) using two previous years' tax data, also known as "prior-prior year" data. Utilizing prior-prior year data means that the FAFSA can now be made available to students three months earlier than it is currently—beginning this October 1, rather than January 1, 2017—and students and their families have the potential to understand and consider their financial aid options sooner. Implementing this "Early FAFSA" will help millions of American families make more informed decisions about higher education and has the potential to significantly increase college enrollment and completion.


However, making the FAFSA available earlier through the use of prior-prior year data is only one piece of the puzzle. On March 25, Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell sent a letter to your member institutions urging them to take steps to support the Department's FAFSA

improvements, and we echo that request for your assistance. In order to fully realize the potential benefits of Early FAFSA for students, colleges and universities should not simply move up their financial deadlines in ways that would disadvantage students who are most in need of the additional time to consider their financial options. Moving up priority aid deadlines would cause some students—particularly low-income students—to be unable to file their paperwork on time, and as a result these students could lose out on important sources of financial aid they need in order to be successful in higher education. To best serve students, we believe that institutions should strike a delicate balance between providing aid packages at least a few weeks prior to the May 1 admissions decision deadline and without significantly moving their priority aid deadlines forward, particularly into December.

As we noted in our letter to the Department last June, “use of prior-prior year data is an opportunity for swift and consequential action to support low- and- middle-income students seeking a shot at the American dream through higher education, and would allow the federal government to simplify the process that millions of students and families experience when applying for aid.” Students and their families cannot fully access that opportunity without the support of colleges and universities across the country. While we appreciate that this positive change may cause some short-term complexity as colleges adjust to the new timeline, we believe the long-term gains for America’s students are well worth the effort.

The colleges and universities you represent do so much every day to ensure that the federal financial aid system serves students well. We ask you to help us ensure that the promise of using prior-prior year data is fulfilled and move toward our shared goal of increasing choice, access and persistence for every student, regardless of background.

Sincerely,




Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Mark Pocan
United States Representative




Patty Murray
United States Senator



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
United States Representative



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Frederica Wilson
United States Representative

Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Ben Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Jared Polis

Jared Polis
United States Representative

Jan Schakowsky

Jan Schakowsky
United States Representative

Sam Farr

Sam Farr
United States Representative

Gwendolynne S. Moore

Gwendolynne S. Moore
United States Representative

Rubén Hinojosa

Rubén Hinojosa
United States Representative

Lloyd Doggett

Lloyd Doggett
United States Representative

Mike Honda

Mike Honda
United States Representative

Ron Kind

Ron Kind
United States Representative

Cedric Richmond

Cedric Richmond
United States Representative

Marcy Kaptur

Marcy Kaptur
United States Representative


Bill Keating

Bill Keating
United States Representative

Mark DeSaulnier

Mark DeSaulnier
United States Representative


Charlie Rangel
United States Representative


James P. McGovern
United States Representative