

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education
Labor, and Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On September 30th, the authorization for the Perkins Loan Program, the nation's oldest federal student loan program and a critical lifeline for many low-income students, will lapse absent congressional action. This month, we introduced the Perkins Loan Program Extension Act, which would extend the authorization for this important program for two years, allowing it to continue to serve students in need while Congress has the opportunity to review the range of federal financial assistance programs while working to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. We strongly support the Perkins Loan Program and write to urge the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to act on its extension expeditiously and allow the full Senate to swiftly follow suit.

Since 1958, the Perkins Loan Program has existed with broad bipartisan support and has provided more than \$28 billion in loans through almost 26 million awards, helping students across the country achieve a higher education. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the program lent \$1.697 billion to more than 770,000 students with financial need across more than 1,400 institutions of higher education.

The Perkins Loan Program operates through a campus-based revolving fund that leverages federal dollars with significant institutional investment that gives colleges and universities "skin in the game." In fact, even though Congress has not appropriated new funds for this program for more than a decade, colleges and universities have continued to participate in this important, self-sustaining program. As a campus-based program, Perkins enables institutions to provide targeted support to the students they know have the greatest financial need. That is why it is supported by a broad range of higher education groups, including the Association of American Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the American Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators, the Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations, the American Council on Education and many others, as well as institutions of higher education across the country.

Two years ago, the program's authorization briefly lapsed, but you worked with us and other supportive Senators to develop and advance a bipartisan compromise that allowed this

longstanding program to continue to support students. Once again, there is strong bipartisan, bicameral support for legislation that would preserve the Perkins program; more than 220 of our House colleagues have cosponsored a companion to our legislation.

We recognize the need for reform and improvement in our federal financial aid system. There are proposals aimed at making the range of aid programs work better for students, parents, and institutions, which should be evaluated. We believe the appropriate venue for examining their future is a thorough discussion and debate of a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in the HELP Committee and on the Senate floor, and very much look forward to that effort. However, allowing the Perkins Loan Program to expire this month will unfairly eliminate discussion of the future of this longstanding, popular program from that holistic conversation about federal financial aid. We do not believe that is fair or appropriate for the students, families and institutions which rely on it.

We urge you to take up and pass the Perkins Loan Program Extension Act without delay. We thank you for your consideration and stand ready to work with you to advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Senator Minority Leader