

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2024

The Honorable Dr. Miguel A. Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

We are writing to express deep concerns about the impact of the 2024-2025 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) formula changes on continuing undergraduate students, particularly those from family farm backgrounds. We recognize these changes were implemented as a result of the *FAFSA Simplification Act*. However, these changes have led to troubling reports of students receiving less financial aid than in previous years, forcing some to choose between continuing their education, transferring, or dropping out of college entirely. We urge you to promptly address the challenges with the Student Aid Index (SAI), specifically calculating family farms. Additionally, we request that the Department provide resources to families that have received less financial aid than in previous years to help navigate these additional hurdles to affording the cost of attendance and explore ways to help these families.

Under this new formula, there have been reports of loss of financial aid eligibility for students from families that own farms. Prior to this year, the net value of a family farm was not included on the FAFSA. Students from farm families must list the net worth of the farm as an asset leading to an increased SAI. With a higher SAI students from farm families qualify for less aid, or possibly no aid. The new formula does not consider the nature of farm assets compared to traditional investments. The revenue stream for crops and livestock varies significantly year-to-year, and therefore, assets cannot be calculated in the same capacity as traditional investments.

Moreover, the timeline for sending Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs) further exacerbated these challenges. The Department announced on January 30th that ISIRs would not be sent to colleges and universities until early March.¹ This delay, coupled with the miscalculation of SAI for dependent students who reported assets, further hindered colleges from receiving ISIR data and sending out financial aid offers to students. In March, the Department announced that students would not be able to make corrections to their FAFSA until the first half of April and encouraged colleges to push back their enrollment deadlines.²³ This created an untenable timeline for continuing students to review aid offers. As a result, many continuing students are just finding out that they cannot afford the cost of attendance at the same time as many schools' enrollment

¹ U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Announces More Than 3.1 Million FAFSA Forms Successfully Submitted and Update to Student Aid Index Calculation," (January 2024), <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-more-31-million-fafsa-forms-successfully-submitted-and-update-student-aid-index-calculation>.

² U.S. Department of Education, "Update on 2024-25 FAFSA Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR) Delivery," (March 2024), <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2024-03-22/update-2024-25-fafsa-institutional-student-information-record-isir-delivery>.

³ National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), "ED Updates College Presidents on FAFSA Rollout, Urges Schools to Extend Decision Dates," (March 2024), <https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/33117/ED-Updates-College-Presidents-on-FAFSA-Rollout-Urges-Schools-to-Extend-Decision-Dates>.

deadlines have already passed. Students can no longer consider other options. Unlike incoming first-year students, who are comparing multiple offers, these students assumed they would be able to continue their college education and are less likely to have other immediate options.

Therefore, we urge the Department to provide prompt guidance and tailored resources to continuing students from farm families who are receiving less aid than in previous years due to new formula changes. These farm families, whose businesses are vital to our state's communities and economies, need specialized assistance that considers their unique business model as the Department prepares for the 2025-2026 FAFSA rollout.

Additionally, we request that the Department communicate any expected delays before the 2025-2026 FAFSA rollout and any resources needed from Congress to ensure a smooth process for both current and incoming students.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to your prompt action and response.

Sincerely,



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



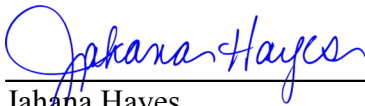
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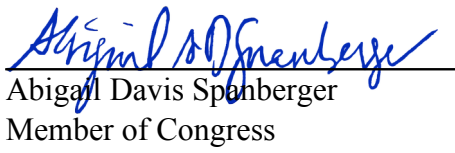
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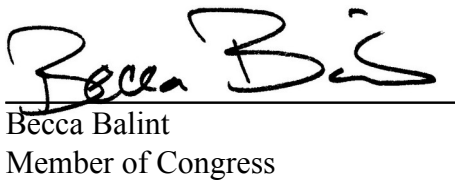
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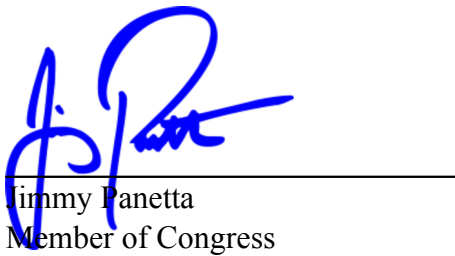

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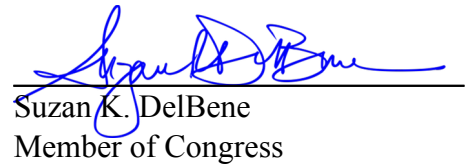

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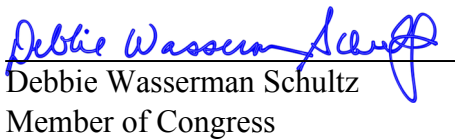

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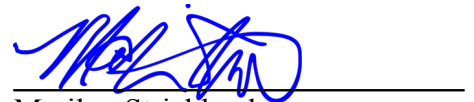
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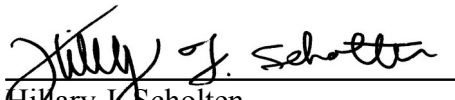
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