

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

May 7, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Cardona:

The Department of Education's (Department) ongoing challenges to implement smoothly the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in a timely and effective manner are causing delays in the college enrollment process for millions of students. We are joining together as a bipartisan group of authorizing and appropriations committee leadership to express our concerns with the number of errors and delays in the implementation of the new FAFSA. We urge the Department to take steps to ensure these problems do not occur again for the 2025-2026 school year. Together, we want to provide the opportunity of postsecondary education to as many of America's students who choose to pursue this path.

On an annual basis almost 18 million students depend on the FAFSA to access federal, state, and institutional financial aid to pay for college. Despite having three years to prepare the roll out of the new FAFSA, five months into 2024, the Department is still working to iron out errors and fulfill the necessary reprocessing of forms.

The rocky implementation of the new FAFSA caused a financial aid traffic jam with weighty implications for students. Without the financial information provided by the FAFSA, institutions cannot issue financial aid offers. Without these offers, it is more difficult for students and families to choose where to enroll. These barriers pose added challenges to students and families entering higher education this year and make it less likely that current students will continue in their college journey this year and in the years ahead.

We implore you to ensure the next application cycle for the 2025-2026 FAFSA goes smoothly. Further, given the leadership transition within the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) we urge you to demonstrate hands-on management and a thorough review of actions within FSA in order to rectify the failures of this FAFSA cycle.

This year's FAFSA was not ready for the expected October 1 application opening, and the public was not given clear information about when the FAFSA would be released, which ultimately was not until December 31st. There are signs that the next cycle will face similar issues. The Department typically publishes the draft FAFSA for the next award year in February or March

for comment. This has not yet happened. The Department has told our staff that it is not ready to talk about next year or any new plans to add more substantive consumer testing, which would help prevent future errors.

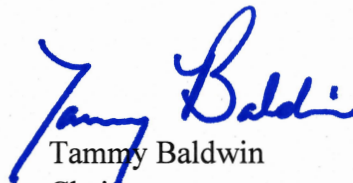
In the interest of ensuring a smooth FAFSA rollout for students and families next cycle, we insist on full transparency from you and your staff. We request that you provide weekly updates on the timeline, consumer testing, and bug fixes on the 2025-2026 FAFSA to our staff beginning the first week in June. We also request the Department provide a list of any current errors or issues with the form that require resolution before next FAFSA cycle to us by July 8, 2024 and the planned timeline for resolution of those issues. Further, we request that a beta version of the online form be made available to us by no later than September 9, 2024, with a timeline for testing the online form with real students and financial aid administrators and bringing the application live.

We hope you can commit to charting a path forward with us together.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Aderholt
Chair
U.S. House Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies



Tammy Baldwin
Chair
U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies



Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions



Tom Cole
Chair
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations



Susan M. Collins
Vice Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations



Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations



Virginia Foxx
Chair
U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce



Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations



Bernard Sanders
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce