

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 8, 2020

Secretary Betsy DeVos
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202-7100

Dear Secretary DeVos,

We are writing to urge you to issue revised guidance to higher education institutions, to ensure that the Cost of Attendance (COA) budget restrictions do not limit their ability to provide needed emergency funding assistance to students in need during this global pandemic.

Due to the ever-changing nature of this pandemic and the needs of our constituents, we are also asking that the Department of Education clarify existing policy regarding “overawards” that occur after a student’s financial aid has been fully disbursed. While certain “overawards,” are allowed up to \$300.00, additional guidance is needed for higher education institutions.

According to the Department of Education’s guidance for higher education institutions, emergency funds given to a student are considered financial assistance – even when they are specifically listed as not for costs relating to tuition, fees, or other direct educational learning expenses. On March 5th, the Department of Education did remind institutions of higher learning that they may adjust students’ COA budget, on a case-by-case basis, to reflect additional costs incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the unpredicted impact of COVID-19 on our nation, it is no longer feasible that schools can review every impacted student on a case-by-case basis.

Since that March 5th announcement, most schools across the country have now temporarily closed or moved courses online causing many students to find new housing and alternative employment. For many students, they have gone from secure housing and gainful employment to losing all that within just a matter of days. If a college or university provides students with essential emergency funding assistance, this rule means that funding counts against students’ Estimated Financial Assistance (EFA). We must remedy this situation in order to ensure our students are able to care for themselves during this COVID-19 pandemic and be able to complete their education.

Our higher education institutions are determined to support their students and ensure no student is without food or shelter during this crisis. We are seeking a revision of this March 5th announcement so that students can accept financial help now. It is unfair to punish or hinder assistance from higher education institutions who are seeking avenues to ensure their students are supported now and can complete their education in the near future.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

T.J. Cox
Member of Congress

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
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Bill Foster
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Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
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Jimmy Panetta
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David Scott
Member of Congress

Jennifer Wexton
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