

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

May 31, 2016

The Honorable Dr. John King
Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary King:

Throughout my time in the Senate, I have fought to remove educational barriers for homeless children and youth. As I expressed to you in a letter earlier this year, I am particularly concerned about the serious roadblocks unaccompanied homeless students face in applying for and receiving financial aid. Removing these barriers can help more young people pursue a college degree and achieve their dreams.

As you know, unaccompanied homeless youth are young people who experience homelessness while not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Many unaccompanied youth have experienced severe trauma, including abuse and neglect and family dysfunction. Because unaccompanied youth do not receive financial support from their parents, they do not have the necessary parental information to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). It is critical that the Department of Education ("the Department") streamlines the path for unaccompanied homeless youth to receive the financial support they need to attend and succeed in higher education.

In February, I requested that the Department align the definition of "youth" in the FAFSA with the definition under the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (CCRAA, P.L. 110-84). I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to continuing to work together to address this issue in the coming year. In addition, I appreciate the Department's work in addressing many of the barriers unaccompanied homeless youth face in the most recent Application and Verification Guide (AVG) and the July 29, 2015 Dear Colleague letter (GEN-15-16).

Unfortunately, the proposed 2017-18 FAFSA also contains solvable barriers to success for unaccompanied homeless youth. Instead of taking into account the strides made by the AVG and your recent Dear Colleague, the proposal instead contains harsh and aggressive language that intimidates, instead of supports, unaccompanied homeless youth. In particular, I was concerned to see that unaccompanied homeless youth are told that all decisions are final, which would imply that they do not have the option to contact the Federal Student Aid Ombudsman with questions about their status or challenges they may face in receiving the required determinations. And, students are told to provide written documentation about their living situation – an impossibility for many, if not most, of these homeless students. As the Dear Colleague clearly

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states, if a student does not have written evidence of their situation, their financial aid administrator may make a determination about your status based on a documented interview with you. It is also important to note, as so clearly stated in the Dear Colleague, that financial aid administrators is required to make a homeless youth determination upon request.

In order to ensure that all unaccompanied homeless youth have a clear path to financial support, I urge the Department to take into consideration the recommendations I have attached, which are aligned with the AVG and the Dear Colleague. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Murray
United States Senator