

LAMAR ALEXANDER, TENNESSEE, CHAIRMAN

MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING
RICHARD BURR, NORTH CAROLINA
JOHNNY ISAKSON, GEORGIA
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE
BILL CASSIDY, M.D., LOUISIANA
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA
ORRIN HATCH, UTAH
PAT ROBERTS, KANSAS
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
TIM SCOTT, SOUTH CAROLINA

PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON
BERNARD SANDERS (I), VERMONT
ROBERT F. CASEY, JR., PENNSYLVANIA
AL FRANKEN, MINNESOTA
MICHAEL F. BENNET, COLORADO
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
ELIZABETH WARREN, MASSACHUSETTS
TIM KAINE, VIRGINIA
MARGARET WOOD HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

DAVID P. CLEARY, STAFF DIRECTOR
EVAN SCHATZ, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

<http://help.senate.gov>

May 1, 2017

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We are writing to request regular briefings for our staff regarding the status of the work toward reinstating the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT). We appreciate the staff briefing we received on March 30 from the U.S. Department of Education (“Department”) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regarding the temporary suspension of the DRT. Additionally, we are encouraged by the Department’s recent announcement easing the process of verification for financial aid applicants. However, we remain concerned that students, families, and borrowers do not have access to the DRT and face continued burdens associated with the outage.

On March 3, the Department and the IRS suspended the availability of the DRT because of concerns about the security of taxpayer data. The DRT is an important tool for students and families filing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and borrowers certifying or recertifying their income-driven repayment (IDR) plans. Realizing that a significant number of students have yet to complete the 2017-2018 FAFSA, and IDR plan certifications and re-certifications occur year-round, we encourage the Department to prioritize work on a solution that will reinstate the DRT as soon as possible in the current FAFSA application cycle while also ensuring adequate protection for users’ data.

Therefore, we request a briefing for our staff on May 4, 2017 regarding the status of the work toward reinstating the DRT and information we requested on the options for solving and mitigating the burden of the outage. We also request that this initial briefing be followed by regular bi-weekly briefings and the Department develop and share an action plan to bring the tool back online as soon as possible with appropriate safety standards to prevent further abuse. We ask that this action plan detail the specific steps that are being taken to address security concerns of the tool, the communication efforts being employed, the resources being used (internal and external) to expedite getting the tool online, the challenges that may occur as the Department works on an expedited timeline, how the Department plans to address and overcome those challenges, and any options to reinstate the DRT before the announced October deadline.

Additionally, we are restating our prior request on March 24 regarding additional actions the Department can take now to reduce the complications and burden of the DRT outage for students, families, borrowers, student loan servicers, and institutions of higher education. Thank you for your ongoing attention to this urgent matter.

If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Bob Moran on the Majority Staff and Bryce McKibben on the Minority Staff of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions.

Sincerely,



LAMAR ALEXANDER
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor & Pensions



PATTY MURRAY
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions