

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write today to express deep concerns about the slow disbursement of Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students under Section 18004(a)(1) of the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* and the guidance the Department of Education issued on April 21. We ask for your support to ensure students promptly receive this emergency aid and that the guidance be changed to allow all students to receive assistance.

The Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students program under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund provided by the *CARES Act* is intended to help students in need right now as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 9, your department announced that the more than \$6 billion available would be disbursed “immediately.” Unfortunately, that has proven wildly inaccurate.

It was reported that as of April 20 only \$6 million of this funding has been disbursed to colleges and universities. Students across the nation are in financial distress as they struggle to cover expenses related to campus disruptions due to COVID-19, including food, housing, course materials, technology, health care, and childcare costs. The funding your department has not provided would go a long way to addressing these needs.

Colleges and universities initially experienced technical difficulties, dealt with confusion on how to apply for the funds, and waited for guidance on how funds could be used. Now applications that have been submitted wait to be processed.

What we have heard from the Department of Education on why so little money has been sent out amount to nothing more than excuses. A pandemic is not the time to pass the buck but to take responsibility for what has happened and work expeditiously to correct problems.

And, while we appreciate that your department finally issued guidelines on the use of these funds, said guidelines are extremely problematic. It restricts funds to those students who have applied for or could apply for financial aid under Section 484 of the *Higher Education Act*. This excludes DACA recipients, international students, students in basic adult education and dual enrollment courses who do not have a high school diploma. It also effectively excludes students not already receiving financial aid because schools likely would not know if a student meets the requirements of Section 484 unless they have already applied for or are receiving aid.

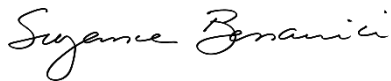
This narrow guidance goes against the broad language of the *CARES Act* and the congressional intent of providing help to all students. In this extraordinary time we should not be dividing students based on immigration status or unduly limiting aid. This pandemic has upended the lives of all students from coast to coast, and colleges and universities should have the flexibility to help those in need.

We request that you immediately help students most in need during these unprecedented and challenging times and ensure emergency financial aid grants are fully distributed in an efficient manner. Additionally, we request you change your guidance to allow all students access to this vital aid.

Sincerely,



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



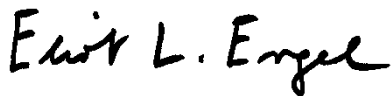
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Jim Langevin
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Barbara Lee
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress