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Leadership and Advocacy

April 12, 2017

Secretary Betsy DeVos
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

On behalf of the undersigned higher education organizations, we write to express our grave concern with the recent suspension of the Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool (or IRS-DRT). Subsequent announcements have indicated that the tool will not be available to student aid applicants for the remainder of this award year, and is not expected to be operative until October 1, 2017, at the earliest.

This extreme delay will have a profound impact on low-income students applying (or reapplying) for federal financial aid and borrowers applying for income-based repayment plans. The consequences of suspending the DRT undermine the benefits of the recent shift to using Prior-Prior Year income and tax data. We have already seen the negative impact of the loss of this tool, as students and families have experienced unnecessary confusion and states have been forced to delay application deadlines, all leading to more barriers to college for low income and other students. Furthermore, as many states base their state aid programs on federal eligibility determinations, complications with filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid will necessarily introduce additional delay and difficulty for students.

We recognize the seriousness of the IRS' concerns regarding the security of data and the possible misuse of the tool to commit tax fraud, but this should not preclude the timely adoption of reasonable security measures or a revised system. Use of the IRS-DRT is not merely a convenience to students: it is vital to ensuring that students, particularly those least likely to receive federal financial aid, can in fact do so.

We urge Department of Education and the Internal Revenue Service to use all necessary resources to resolve these issues as quickly as possible. In the meantime, we request that the Department take immediate steps to alleviate the increased burden that is now falling on millions of student applicants.

Our organizations and our members are eager to work with you to quickly restore this critical tool and guarantee that students and their families are able to reliably access the federal financial aid programs you oversee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Molly Corbett Broad', written in a cursive style.

Molly Corbett Broad

Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool
April 12, 2017

On behalf of:

ACPA - College Student Educators International
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
Association of American Universities
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Research Libraries
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Council for Opportunity in Education
Educational Testing Service
EDUCAUSE
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of College and University Business Officers
Thurgood Marshall College Fund
University Professional and Continuing Education Association