November 20, 2020

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write today to urge you to extend the current suspension of payment and zero percent interest for federal student loan borrowers, as well as the suspension of collections on defaulted loans.

You authorized these critical borrower relief measures in March, which were subsequently included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act with an expiration of September 30, 2020. In August, the administration extended the measures through December 31, 2020. As this deadline rapidly approaches, we ask you to extend this important relief until December 31, 2021, or until the federal government formally declares an end to the pandemic, whichever occurs first.

Since the implementation of this relief last March, the economic circumstances of borrowers have scarcely changed. In fact, with the recent nationwide resurgence of COVID-19, the already-high unemployment rate is likely to increase. Bringing millions of Americans back into repayment in the thick of this crisis will cause additional financial hardship and force borrowers to make difficult decisions about their limited resources. Simply stated, borrowers who continue to be financially impacted by the pandemic need more time to get back on their feet in the form of extended relief from required repayments coupled with zero percent interest. This is especially true for the thousands of students who have recently entered repayment after withdrawing without a degree because of the pandemic.

Finally, we are only six weeks away from when this relief expires. This is not nearly enough time for borrowers to adjust their finances accordingly, especially during a time of such volatility, nor is it enough time to prepare the infrastructure for millions of borrowers resuming payments at once. When overall financial conditions finally do improve, it is critically important to ensure all borrowers have a smooth transition to resuming their repayments to avoid any subsequent spike in defaults. This includes a comprehensive communications plan beginning two months prior to repayments resuming, as the CARES Act required for the initial September 30, 2020, deadline.

We applauded your decision in March and Congress’ subsequent inclusion of these important borrower relief provisions in the CARES Act. We urge you to extend this relief that borrowers continue to need desperately.
Sincerely,

Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream
ACPA - College Student Educators International
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
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 Association of University Professors
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
APPA - Leadership in Educational Facilities
Association of American Colleges & Universities
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
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
Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Common App
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council for Opportunity in Education
Council of Graduate Schools
Council of Independent Colleges
Council on Social Work Education
EDUCAUSE
Higher Education Consultants Association
Higher Education Loan Coalition
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education  
National Association of College and University Business Officers  
National Association of Colleges and Employers  
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities  
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators  
National Collegiate Athletic Association  
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
Thurgood Marshall College Fund  

cc:  
The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
The Honorable Bobby Scott  
The Honorable Patty Murray  
The Honorable Virginia Foxx