

Durbin, Duckworth Join Colleagues To Voice Concerns Over FAFSA Form Error Harming Students In Mixed-Status Families

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and 22 additional Senators in urging U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to address the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form error that is preventing students with contributors, including parents and spouses, who do not have a Social Security number (SSN) from completing the new FAFSA form.

With the passage of the bipartisan *FAFSA Simplification Act* and the *FUTURE Act*, the new FAFSA application was supposed to become more efficient and straightforward for the more than 17 million students who fill out the form each year. The Department of Education (ED) launched the new FAFSA form in late December 2023, but contributors without Social Security Numbers (SSNs) still cannot complete their part of the application. ED pledged to solve the issue by mid-March and has provided a small-scale temporary option that is still preventing impacted students from filing their complete application.

The Senators also called on ED to remedy the incomplete guidance for higher education institutions and students, confusion and misinformation surrounding the form, and the long-term educational impacts of this error.

“We remain concerned about the Department’s plan to address the ongoing error that does not allow for contributors without a Social Security Number (SSN) to complete the FAFSA application, the impact of this error, and how any remedies will be communicated in a culturally relevant manner to impacted students, institutions of higher education, and other student financial aid stakeholders,” wrote the Senators.

“We are concerned that without clear direction from the Department, these students will miss out on opportunities and not be able to finance their higher education,” continued the Senators. “There remains widespread misinformation, a lack of clear communication with students and stakeholders, and no plan to address the long-term impact that this error may have on the educational prospects for some of our most vulnerable students.”

Specifically, the Senators requested answers from ED by March 12, including the timeline for the form fix, how it will address misinformation, what resources it will make available, and what its communication plan will be to all impacted stakeholders, including students in underserved communities and rural areas. They also pushed for a comprehensive, easy-to-find “Frequently Asked Questions” website link and document to help students with contributors who do not have a SSN navigate making updates to their applications.

The letter is endorsed by organizations and stakeholders including the Presidents’ Alliance for Higher Education and Immigration, the Education Trust, the National Education Association (NEA), Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), ImmSchools, National College Attainment Network (NCAN), National Immigration Law Center (NILC), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).

In addition to Durbin, Duckworth, Padilla, and Sanders, U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Laphonza Butler (D-CA), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), John Fetterman (D-PA), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Peter Welch (D-VT), and Ron Wyden (D-OR) also signed the letter.

The full text of the letter is available [here](#).