

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 29, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader
The Capitol, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Reid:

On October 1, the authorization of the Perkins Loan Program, the nation's oldest federal student loan program and a critical lifeline for many low-income students, expired. While our colleagues in the House of Representatives unanimously approved a one-year, no-cost extension of the program through the Higher Education Extension Act (H.R. 3594), the Senate has yet to advance that measure. As a result, thousands of current and future students face uncertainty and hundreds of institutions are struggling to find another way to help their neediest students afford their education. We write to express our strong support for the Perkins Loan Program and to request that the Senate take up and pass the Higher Education Extension Act as soon as possible.

The Perkins Loan Program has existed with broad bipartisan support since 1958 and has provided more than \$28 billion in loans through almost 26 million awards to students in all 50 states. In the last academic year alone, the program lent \$1.1 billion to more than half a million students with financial need across more than 1,500 institutions of higher education.


The Perkins Loan Program disburses financial aid to students through a campus-based revolving fund that leverages federal dollars with significant institutional investment. Colleges and universities have continued to participate in this self-sustaining program despite a lapse in federal appropriations for nearly a decade. The required institutional capital contribution gives colleges and universities "skin in the game," and the loan payments from graduates are used to make new loans to other students. As a campus-based program, Perkins also enables these institutions to provide targeted support to the students they know have the greatest financial need. That is why it is broadly supported by higher education groups, including the Association of American Universities, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the American Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators, the Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations, the American Council on Education and many others, as well as dozens of individual colleges and universities across the country.


There are many students who will be disadvantaged by the Senate's inaction and the program's expiration. For example, students who have previously received Perkins loans will lose their eligibility if they change institutions or academic programs. In addition, if the program is not reauthorized soon, students seeking Perkins loans for the upcoming winter and spring semesters in 2016 may be ineligible. All future students will be ineligible for this vital program, which helps fill the gaps between what is available through the Direct Loan Program and a family's ability to pay. On average, this is \$2,000 in financial aid. As many as 150,000 current freshmen will lose access to these loans in the next academic year.


Many Senators have proposals aimed at making our various federal student aid programs work better for students, parents, and institutions. We look forward to discussing and debating ways to improve these important federal supports for higher education during this congress. In the meantime, we should immediately take up and pass the House-passed extension to provide certainty to students and ensure that this important source of student financial assistance is not interrupted.

Immediately taking up the House-passed extension bill is a simple solution that can provide clarity in the near term to students and the colleges and universities that serve them without any cost to the federal government. The Congressional Budget Office concluded that this one-year extension would incur no new costs to the federal government because it includes limitations on the length of student participation in the program. The House has already acted unanimously to extend the Perkins Loan Program for one year. We urge you to take up and pass the Higher Education Extension Act without delay.

Sincerely,


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator


Susan M. Collins
United States Senator


Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator


Rob Portman
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Kelly A. Ayotte

Kelly A. Ayotte
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Ron Johnson

Ron Johnson
United States Senator

Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Mark Steven Kirk

Mark Steven Kirk
United States Senator

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Pat Toomey

Pat Toomey
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

John Thune

John Thune
United States Senator

Joe Donnelly

Joe Donnelly
United States Senator

M. Michael Rounds

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Lindsey O. Graham

Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



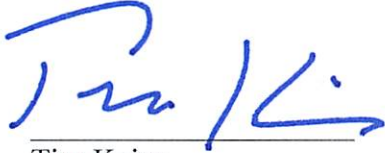
Jerry Moran
United States Senator



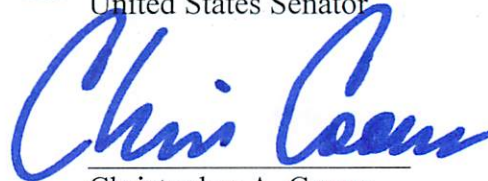
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



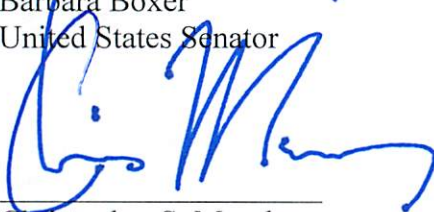
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



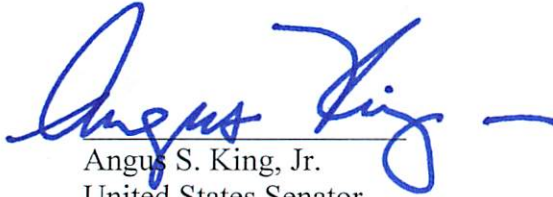
Bill Nelson
United States Senator



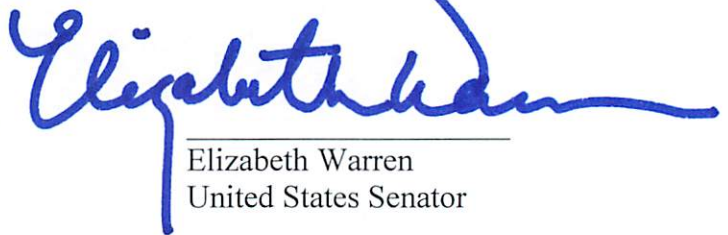
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



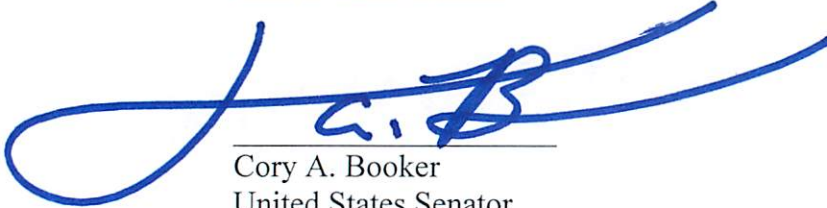
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United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



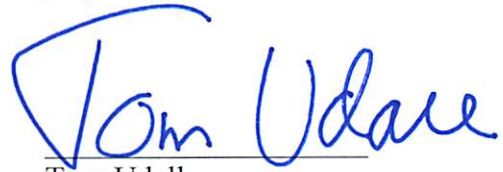
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



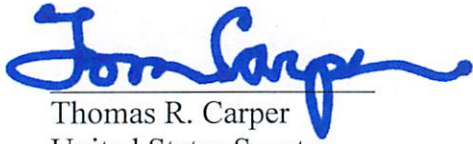
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



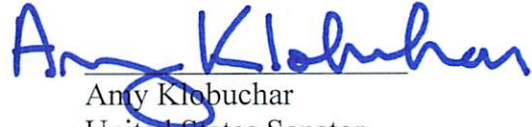
Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator




Tom Udall
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



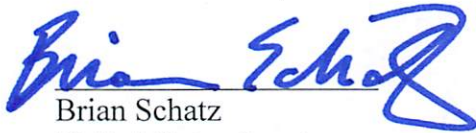
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



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United States Senator