

September 27, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

As you develop a long-term approach to reducing federal budget deficits, we urge you to ensure access to college for all Americans and not to shift the federal government's debt burden onto students and their families. If our nation is going to compete in today's economy, we need a more educated populace, and that requires investments, not just cuts.

We know you face a challenging task. Tough decisions will be needed if we are going to put our nation on a stronger economic path. But a strong economy also requires an educated workforce, and an educated workforce comes from providing students and their families with the supports they need to prepare for, enroll in, and complete college. Cutting access to Pell Grants as well as other essential educational and workforce programs will lower college completion rates, hamper the economy, and undermine our ability to compete internationally at the very moment when we can least afford it.

The maximum Pell Grant will cover less than a third of the cost of attending a four-year public college next year—the smallest share in the history of the program. Pell Grant recipients are already more than twice as likely as other students to have student loans, and Pell Grant recipients who graduate from four-year colleges already have an average debt of \$24,800—\$3,500 more than their higher income peers. Pell Grant recipients and their families also derive much less benefit from higher education tax provisions than students from higher income families.

Simply put, our students and their families are maxed out. They cannot afford to take on any more personal debt. If our country is going to continue to create jobs that make us more globally competitive, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction needs to preserve our country's tools for increasing college access and completion without piling more debt on students and families. This cannot be done without increasing tax revenues, which are currently at their lowest levels as a percentage of the economy in 60 years.

We urge the Committee to develop a deficit reduction plan that not only reduces spending but also raises revenue from those who can afford to pay more, and recognizes that today's students are tomorrow's economic engine. Pell Grants, like other critical education and workforce programs, help provide today's low- and moderate-income families with the opportunity to be part of that engine.

Sincerely,

All Education Matters  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
American Association of University Women  
American Medical Student Association  
American School Counselor Association

American Student Association of Community Colleges  
California State Student Association  
Campaign for College Affordability  
Campus Progress Action  
Center for Law and Social Policy  
College Access Network of Utah  
College Summit  
Community College League of California  
Corporate Voices for Working Families  
Crittenton Women's Union  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Dēmos: A Network for Ideas & Action  
The Education Trust  
The Forum for Youth Investment  
Generational Alliance  
Georgia College Access Network  
Green Dot Public Schools  
The Greenlining Institute  
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities  
The Illinois Education Foundation  
The Institute for College Access & Success  
Institute for Higher Education Policy  
Iowa College Access Network  
KIPP Foundation  
KnowHow2GO-CT  
League of Education Voters  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
Marin College Access Network  
Michigan College Access Network  
Minnesota College Access Network  
MomsRising  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education  
National Black Law Students Association  
National College Access Network  
National Consumer Law Center on behalf of its low income clients  
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)  
Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project  
Public Advocates  
Rock the Vote  
Roosevelt Institute Campus Network  
SingleStop USA  
Southern Maryland College Access Network  
Southwest Indiana College Access Network  
Stand for Children – Texas  
Thurgood Marshall College Fund  
United States Student Association  
Women Employed  
Year Up  
Young Invincibles