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