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April 29, 2020

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

COVID-19 has devastated the finances of many Americans both in my district and across the country, including students currently attending or planning to enroll in college. However, this recent financial hardship is not reflected in previously submitted Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and subsequent financial aid packages. I write today to request that the Department of Education consider the specific FAFSA-related assistance recommendations for students and families outlined below.

As you know, the FAFSA helps students and their families determine their eligibility for federal financial aid, which includes access to federal grants, loans, and work-study programs to pay for costs associated with enrollment in an institution of higher education. This process establishes a student's expected family contribution (EFC), which is based on income, assets, and other factors. However, many of these students are facing financial hardship due to the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in FAFSA applications that are outdated and do not reflect their current financial situations.

Fortunately, the Higher Education Act allows financial aid administrators to make necessary adjustments to a student's FAFSA application in order to accurately calculate a student's EFC. This process is called Professional Judgment and is available to students who have already submitted their FAFSA application. However, I am concerned that students both in my district and across the country may not know about this process and consequently fail to pursue it. This includes first-generation college students and recent high school graduates who have not yet matriculated and received information on campus services. I fear that without necessary guidance from the Department of Education regarding Professional Judgment, some students may end up dropping out or postponing their pursuit of a college education due to the financial hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To address these concerns, we urge the Department to do the following:

1. Include information for students on its COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page explaining the Professional Judgement process and to conduct additional outreach to students, so that they have the information they need.
2. Clarify whether the [GEN-09-04\[3\]](#) and [GEN-09-05\[4\]](#) guidance on Professional Judgement issued by the Department is still in effect and communicate this clarification to institutions of higher education.
3. Provide financial aid administrators at colleges and universities additional training on the Professional Judgement process through webinars and tutorials.

It is critical that we take the necessary steps to ensure that COVID-19 does not prevent students from accessing affordable higher educational opportunities. That is why I am urging the Department of Education, under your guidance, to carefully consider the recommendations outlined above. Thank you for your department's efforts during this crisis, and I look forward to working together to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus on student learning and achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josh Harder". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Josh Harder  
United States Representative (CA-10)