

November 12, 2013

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
U.S. House of Representatives
2235 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Cummings:

On behalf of the nearly 800,000 low-income, first-generation students served by the Federal TRIO Programs, I write to express my strong support for the FAFSA Fairness Act as it would eliminate structural barriers that inhibit some of the most vulnerable students in pursuit of higher education.

As you are well aware, many times students from low-income backgrounds find themselves in circumstances in which they have been constructively, if not literally, abandoned. In some cases, students are unceremoniously dropped off with a relative or family friend and never retrieved by their parents. In other instances, the circumstances at home prove to be so dangerous and abusive that students leave by their own volition. As a result, food and housing insecurity remain familiar foes of such students; yet, despite these circumstances, they manage to persist in their studies, often through the help of access and success programs like TRIO. However, as these students strive towards college enrollment, the financial aid application can unwittingly pose additional roadblocks that may dissuade students from completing the process. The FAFSA Fairness Act remedies this concern in a way that is both equitable and reasonable.

By establishing a category of “provisional independence” for financial aid applicants who have left home due to an abusive environment, are unable to locate their parents, have parents who are incarcerated, or who meet other conditions that prevent them from accessing parental financial information, this bill creates an easier pathway for these students to pursue the financial aid application process. It does not negate the need to demonstrate financial independence, but rather shifts the timing of that responsibility in the financial aid process. Thus, while it alleviates the students’ burden to pursue the dependency override process at each institution to which they apply, they must still undergo that process at the institution at which they intend to enroll. Finally, the bill rightfully puts safeguards in place to preserve the integrity of the federal aid process as well as the authority of financial aid administrators.

It is for the reasons stated above that the Council happily lends its full support to the FAFSA Fairness Act.

Sincerely,



Maureen Hoyler
President