

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 16, 2020

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretaries Mnuchin and DeVos:

We urge you to partner to conduct a public awareness campaign about the availability of Economic Impact Payments to students and families who may not have filed federal tax returns or submitted the information needed to access this critical financial support. While the majority of Economic Impact Payments have now been sent to tax-filers and those who were able to submit alternative documentation, there are still many individuals who are likely eligible for the rebates that do not know they are eligible and have not received them. Additionally, some scam artists have attempted to take advantage of students and steal their stimulus checks through phishing emails. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has created new and severe challenges for most Americans, and many families are concentrating on taking care of themselves and their loved ones without full awareness of the benefits provided by Congress.

Section 2201 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (“CARES Act”), Public Law No. 116-136, contains a directive for the Secretary of the Treasury to “conduct a public awareness campaign, in coordination with the Commissioner of Social Security and the heads of other relevant Federal agencies, to provide information regarding the availability of the credit and rebate ... to individuals who may not have filed a tax return for taxable year 2018 or 2019.” The U.S. Department of the Treasury has already partnered with the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct outreach and identify individuals eligible for rebates. The U.S. Department of Education is also a highly relevant federal agency to assist students and their families in obtaining these critical rebates, which can help them meet their basic needs.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education processes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (“FAFSA”) and requests to enroll in income-driven repayment plans from tens of millions of applicants, including many who are not required to file federal tax returns. According to data provided to Congress by the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 7.7 million (42 percent) of the 18.5 million total FAFSA applicants in 2018-19 were non-filers. This number includes 6 million parents applying on behalf of their dependents and 1.7 million independent students. While dependent students are not eligible for the rebate under the CARES Act, their parents or guardians may be entitled to such payment.

Among federal student loan borrowers, at least 8.7 million borrowers, many of whom are low-income, are enrolled in income-driven repayment plans. The U.S. Department of Education has the capacity to contact borrowers who do not file a federal tax return, given that such indications

are used in the calculation of the income-driven repayment plan amounts. Providing information about rebates to federal student loan borrowers could help them make progress in reducing their debt or meeting basic needs while their student loan payments, interest, and collections are frozen under the relief provided by the CARES Act.

The Federal Trade Commission recently alerted students about phishing scams where students have been advised to contact the “Financial Department” of their college to get information about their rebate, largely for the purpose of stealing those funds. Additional information from official sources—your agencies—will help to mitigate fraud and abuse.

In order to ensure that all eligible students and their families receive their Economic Impact Payments, we urge you to partner in a public awareness campaign in order to ensure that these individuals are aware of any steps, if necessary, to receive such payments. In this difficult economic environment, these payments may serve as a lifeline for these Americans. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



PATTY MURRAY
Ranking Member, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, & Pensions, U.S. Senate



RON WYDEN
Ranking Member, Committee on Finance,
U.S. Senate