

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 19, 2017

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We are writing to request that the U.S. Department of Education (“Department”) discharge federal student loans held by veterans of the United States armed forces who have severe service-connected disabilities. Veterans who cannot support themselves due to injuries sustained in the line of duty should not be saddled with the additional burden of student debt. In order to better serve these men and women returning home, we request that you improve and automate the process used by the Department to provide severely disabled veterans with the benefits they have earned.

Under Section 437 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), borrowers who have been determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to be unemployable due to a service-connected disability are eligible for a full discharge of their federal student loans and are not required to submit additional documentation. Congress directed additional coordination between the Secretaries of Education, Veterans Affairs, and Defense in bipartisan Senate committee reports on both the Fiscal Year 2018 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, as well as the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, in order to automate loan discharges to eligible veterans and servicemembers using information that already exists in federal databases. This coordination will ensure that those who have served our country can receive the benefits due to them under federal law.

Beginning in April 2016, the Department established a secure data sharing agreement with the Social Security Administration to identify federal student loan borrowers who receive Social Security disability benefits that qualify them for loan forgiveness under the Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) provisions of the HEA. However, this data sharing agreement did not include veterans who have submitted appropriate documentation to the Department of Veterans Affairs and are therefore also eligible for TPD loan discharge. As a result, too many eligible veterans with severe service-connected disabilities have been left out of this streamlined path to discharge due to the absence of a data sharing agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

We request that the Department proceed to establish the necessary agreements with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and federal student loan servicers to ensure our nation’s disabled veterans’ loans are being efficiently discharged, pursuant to the aforementioned bill reports. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator



JACK REED
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable David J. Shulkin, M.D.

Dr. A. Wayne Johnson, Chief Operating Officer, Federal Student Aid