



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

June 27, 2016

Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

Thank you for your letters dated February 9, 2016, and May 31, 2016, urging the U.S. Department of Education (Department) to clarify and simplify the process of applying for federal student aid for unaccompanied homeless students. I want to sincerely thank you for your interest and leadership in this subject, and assure you that we are continuously looking for ways to simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), especially for homeless and other underserved students.

As discussed with your staff over the past few months, the Department has made and continues to make issues affecting unaccompanied homeless youth a priority. Recently, and consistent with your suggestions, we modified the FAFSA help text for homeless students on the paper form to make key distinctions more understandable to applicants in an effort to clarify and simplify the process of applying for financial aid. This change was included in the current year's FAFSA (2016-2017) and will be carried over into future FAFSA forms. In addition, for the 2017-18 FAFSA, we have reviewed and made revisions to the text on the FAFSA on the Web (FOTW) that guides an unaccompanied youth through the independent student determination process. The changes made will reflect the Dear Colleague letter (DCL GEN 15-16) the Department released last summer.

We are committed to identifying additional changes that can be made to the process that further simplify and clarify options for unaccompanied homeless students. To this end, we plan to remove the definition of "youth" from the paper version of the FAFSA, and make changes to the way the online FAFSA processes applications from 22- and 23-year-old applicants who indicate that they are homeless or at risk of being homeless, beginning with the 2018-2019 FAFSA. These changes will allow some homeless students aged 22 or 23 access to a more streamlined process for determining their independent status. Accordingly, as of the 2018-2019 award year, all students who indicate they are homeless or at risk of being homeless will be provided with an opportunity to indicate that they have received an unaccompanied homeless youth determination from one of the three designated officials under section 480(d)(1)(H) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (the HEA).

In addition to these changes to the FAFSA, we are continuing to work closely with the field and homeless youth advocates to improve awareness about Federal policies and provide technical

assistance related to these policies. The Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) and Federal Student Aid (FSA) invited the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) to present at the Federal Student Aid Conferences in December 2014 and 2015. There, NAEHCY spoke to issues affecting homeless youth, such as having a single point of contact on campus for unaccompanied homeless youth. The Department copresented with NAEHCY at those conferences, and provided guidance to attendees on homeless youth and applying for aid. OPE and FSA have participated in two webinars with NAEHCY this year (February 4, 2016, and February 16, 2016), speaking to homeless youth practitioners in the Title IV programs. We also held a joint meeting with the Department of Health and Human Services to speak with homeless youth practitioners (February 25, 2016).

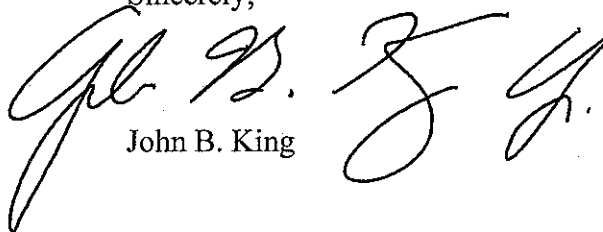
As you may know, I am serving as vice-chair of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and am eager to advance the federal government's goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020. As part of that effort, we launched a new cross-program, interagency homeless initiatives webpage on April 12, 2016, available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/supporting-homeless-students/index.html>. This webpage includes information about Department programs that serve homeless children and youth, as well as programs in other Federal agencies that serve these young people. Links to the guidance on determining independent student status for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth are also included.

Finally, FSA and OPE will host a webinar next month in conjunction with the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program in our Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and its National Center for Homeless Education, primarily for EHCY State Coordinators and local liaisons on Federal Student Aid policy and practice for unaccompanied homeless youth. During this webinar, ED will clarify that local liaisons may write subsequent year letters of verification for unaccompanied homeless youth through age 23 for whom they have the necessary information to write these letters.

Across the Department, we are dedicated to continuing collaboration with homeless community stakeholders. To that end, FSA recently released a fact sheet: "Questions and Answers: Financial Aid and Homeless Youth" (see <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/homeless-youth.pdf>). The fact sheet was designed as a reader-friendly resource about homelessness and applying for federal student aid, and includes information about whom the applicant should reach out to for more information and support in determining his or her federal student aid eligibility.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Lloyd Horwich, the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Department's Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 401-0020.

Sincerely,



John B. King