

July 22, 2015

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

Thank you for your recent statements and actions to strengthen college accountability to better protect both students and taxpayers. In light of the Education Department's announcement that it is developing a new customizable, consumer-focused website to help students and families compare colleges, we write to urge that it alert consumers if a school is the subject of public federal or state investigations, lawsuits, or settlements. Students deserve to know when a college's practices are under heightened scrutiny from federal and state regulators, just as investors in publicly traded for-profit colleges are required to be notified of such events.

Last month, more than a dozen Senate and House members [wrote](#) the Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary urging the inclusion of information about investigations and legal actions in the VA's GI Bill College Comparison Tool. "While an investigation does not amount to a finding of guilt," they note, "it does indicate that there are serious concerns with a school that warrant law enforcement action." We believe all students have a right to this information and need it in order to make informed decisions about where to enroll.

We believe that the Department made the right decision last year when it [publicly committed](#) to "not approve a sale to another entity if that entity is currently under State and/or Federal investigation." Just as the Department would not approve the sale of a school to an entity under investigation, students may choose not to enroll in a school that is under investigation, is being sued by federal or state agencies, or that recently entered into a settlement as a result of such an investigation. Students should not be kept in the dark.

The Education Department has acknowledged the value of this type of consumer information, recently [stating](#) "Heightened Cash Monitoring is not necessarily a red flag to students and taxpayers, but it can serve as a caution light. It means we are watching these institutions more closely to ensure that institutions are using federal student aid in a way that is accountable to both students and taxpayers." However, for this type of information to "serve as a caution light," it must be communicated clearly to consumers, and a consumer-focused college comparison tool is the appropriate place to do so.

No doubt fewer students would have enrolled in Corinthian colleges if they had known of the many investigations and lawsuits against the school, resulting in fewer students being harmed and fewer students needing to have their loans discharged.

Thank you for considering our request and for your commitment to protecting students and taxpayers, and to ensuring that all Americans have access to an affordable, quality college education or training.

Sincerely,

Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
Americans for Financial Reform
Association of the United States Navy (AUSN)
Bet Tzedek Legal Services
Center for Public Interest Law
Center for Responsible Lending
Children's Advocacy Institute
Consumer Action
Consumer Federation of California
Consumers Union
Crittenton Women's Union
Empire Justice Center
Generation Progress
Higher Ed, Not Debt
The Institute for College Access & Success
Institute for Higher Education Policy
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Mississippi Center for Justice
NAACP
National Association of Consumer Advocates
National Association for College Admissions Counseling
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Consumers League
National Education Association (NEA)
National Women Veterans Association of America
National Women's Law Center
New Economy Project
New Jersey Citizen Action
One Wisconsin Now
Project on Predatory Student Lending of the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law
Public Counsel
Public Law Center
Student Debt Crisis
Student Veterans of America
United States Student Association (USSA)

Veterans Education Success
Veterans for Common Sense
Veterans' Student Loan Relief Fund
VetJobs
VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association
Vietnam Veterans of America
Woodstock Institute
Young Invincibles

cc:

Hon. Jason Furman, Chair, Council of Economic Advisors
Hon. Cecilia Muñoz, Director, White House Domestic Policy Council
Hon. Jeffrey Zients, Director, White House National Economic Council