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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–2208

January 13, 2019

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of the United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I am writing today to convey my deep concern for the student loan borrowers negatively impacted by the current government shutdown.

Presently, there are upwards of 800,000 federal employees who will not receive a full paycheck, nor do they know when they will next receive one. These individuals will struggle to cover the cost of rent or a mortgage, childcare, healthcare, and putting food on the table. On top of these more immediate concerns, many federal employees must also consider their monthly student loan payments. Not doing so may put these individuals at risk of falling into the downward spiral of student loan debt.

The furloughed federal employees, and those working without pay, will struggle to meet their financial obligations – through no fault of their own. These individuals are in no way responsible for the current government shutdown, and yet they are the one who will pay the price. In addition to the missed paychecks, those who qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program may experience interruptions to their service, further negatively impacting their ability to pay off student loan debt. Finally, many of these federal employees could be unaware of the various repayment options that may be available to them given the extenuating circumstances.

The current government shutdown has caused immeasurable financial hardship to hundreds of thousands of federal employees. Many of these individuals must also worry about student loan payments on top of their other financial obligations. I strongly urge the Department of Education to do everything in its power to ease the burden of student loan payments on all federal employees. This may include, but is not limited to, reaching out to every student loan provider, asking them to proactively communicate with borrowers the available options to refinance given the extenuating circumstances, and, where possible, extend special dispensation to federal employees who may not otherwise meet the criteria for refinancing. Many loan companies will only consider offering temporary dispensation to federal employees if asked at the most senior levels, so I urge you to demonstrate leadership and reach out to CEOs of the companies personally.

Under normal circumstances, these federal employees would make their student loan payments in a responsible and timely manner. However, these are not normal circumstances. The Department of Education must be aware of how the current government shut down is negatively impacting federal employees and must assist them in any way it can. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your action on this problem.

Sincerely,

Elissa Slotkin

Representative Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

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