January 25, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We thank you for extending the federal student loan payment pause. As we navigate the challenges presented by the Omicron variant, this is a welcome step to reduce financial hardship for families. As you continue to evaluate the best way forward toward an equitable recovery, we urge you to direct the Department of Education to publicly release the memo outlining your legal authority to broadly cancel federal student loan debt and immediately cancel up to $50,000 of student loan debt per borrower.

Cancelling $50,000 of student debt would give 36 million Americans permanent relief and aid the millions more who will eventually resume payments their best chance at thriving in our recovering economy. i In light of high COVID-19 case counts and corresponding economic disruptions, restarting student loan payments without this broad cancellation would be disastrous for millions of borrowers and their families.

Significantly relieving student debt would put borrowers in the best possible position to budget for themselves and their families by reducing the financial shock that the resumption of student loan payments, collections, and interest would bring. Over a quarter of borrowers expect at least one-third of their income will go towards student loans once the pause ends. ii This is partly because borrowers’ budgets and needs have changed since the pandemic began. In fact, 89 percent of full-time employed borrowers are expecting to be financially insecure if their payments resume. iii New variants of COVID-19 are causing cases to spike across the country, leading to widespread uncertainty and exacerbating existing workforce and supply chain challenges. iv As families continue to struggle with financial setbacks emanating from the pandemic, lifting this pause without generous student loan debt cancellation will compound these issues and spur anxiety for working families. Resuming payments without cancellation would also strip $85 billion from our national economy over the next year. v Therefore, eliminating debt before the pause ends is a commonsense step so that millions of borrowers have more breathing room in their family budgets and our national economy is not further held back.
For generations, young people have been encouraged to pursue higher education as a tool for economic and social mobility. However, the enduring weight of student loan debt has negated opportunities for many borrowers to truly transform their lives and our country. Substantially eliminating student debt would help Americans access important paths to build the middle class which have been delayed by student loan debt. More than 80 percent of borrowers with student loan debt report that it holds them back from being able to afford a home. Without this debt, many would be in a better position to begin saving for homeownership as well as retirement and starting a business.

Student loan cancellation would also help close the racial and gender wealth gap in Black and Brown communities that have been borne out of generations of discriminatory policies. Due to systemic barriers, Black, Latino and Native American borrowers are more likely to struggle with repayment and consequently default on their loans at higher rates. Additionally, the average student debt for Black households tripled in the 12 years following the 2008 recession, with Black borrowers owing three times what white borrowers owe just four years after graduating. Freeing up income from student loan payments is a necessary part of reversing these wealth inequities, repairing the harms that decades of discriminatory policies and setting the groundwork for an equitable economic recovery.

By the same token, student loan debt is a rising threat to the retirement security of each borrower. Older Americans have seen the largest increase in student loan debt, with the average amount owed by seniors growing by 71.5 percent in the last 5 years. Over 7 million borrowers aged 50 and up are still paying their student loans or paying for a loved one’s tuition, with 25 percent of those borrowers having to make payments because the student is no longer able. Student loans have hamstrung the ability to save for retirement, with seniors working an additional 2 to 7 years to have the same bank account balances as those retiring without debt. Making payments also tightens their already-strained budgets. Nearly 114,000 older borrowers who default on their loans while receiving Social Security benefits have had their benefits withheld as an offset. For one in four seniors, Social Security makes up 90 percent of their income. Eliminating student loan debt would single-handedly provide much-needed relief to our seniors and secure their ability to retire with dignity.

Publicly releasing the memo outlining your existing authority on cancelling student debt and broadly doing so is crucial to making a meaningful difference in the lives of current students, borrowers, and their families. It has been widely reported that the Department of Education has had this memo since April 5, 2021 after being directed to draft it.

We urge you to use every tool at your disposal to deliver relief to the millions of families inspired by your proposal to make a debt-free college degree within their reach by eliminating up to $50,000 in federal student loan debt for all families before payments resume.

Thank you for your continued work to prioritize student loan debt relief as a key element of the administration’s pandemic recovery plans. Robust assistance to borrowers is necessary to drive a full recovery. We look forward to working with you on this important matter.
Sincerely,

PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress

ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator

AYANNA PRESSLEY
Member of Congress

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senator

ILHAN OMAR
Member of Congress

KATIE PORTER
Member of Congress

/s/
ALMA S. ADAMS Ph.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN
Member of Congress

/s/
KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

/s/
EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress

/s/
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator

/s/
CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator
/s/ JAMAAL BOWMAN, ED.D.  
Member of Congress

/s/ BRENDAN F. BOYLE  
Member of Congress

/s/ SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senator

/s/ TONY CÁRDENAS  
Member of Congress

/s/ ANDRE CARSON  
Member of Congress

/s/ JUDY CHU  
Member of Congress

/s/ DAVID N. CICILLINE  
Member of Congress

/s/ YVETTE CLARKE  
Member of Congress

/s/ J. LUIS CORREA  
Member of Congress

/s/ DANNY K. DAVIS  
Member of Congress

/s/ MADELINE DEAN  
Member of Congress

/s/ MARK DESAULNIER  
Member of Congress

/s/ TAMMY DUCKWORTH  
United States Senator

/s/ RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senator
VERONICA ESCOBAR
Member of Congress

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
Member of Congress

DWIGHT EVANS
Member of Congress

RUBEN GALLEGOS
Member of Congress

JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCIA
Member of Congress

JIMMY GOMEZ
Member of Congress

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

JAHANA HAYES
Member of Congress

MAZIE K. HIROMO
United States Senator

SHEILA JACKSON LEE
Member of Congress

SARAH JACOBS
Member of Congress

HENRY C. “HANK” JOHNSON
Member of Congress

MONDAIRE JONES
Member of Congress

KAIALI‘I KAHELE
Member of Congress
/s/  
RO KHANNA  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ANN KIRKPATRICK  
Member of Congress

/s/  
JOHN B. LARSON  
Member of Congress

/s/  
AL LAWSON  
Member of Congress

/s/  
BARBARA LEE  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ANDY LEVIN  
Member of Congress

/s/  
TED W. LIEU  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ALAN LOWENTHAL  
Member of Congress

/s/  
CAROLYN B. MALONEY  
Member of Congress

/s/  
EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senator

/s/  
JAMES P. MCGOVERN  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ROBERT MENENDEZ  
United States Senator

/s/  
GRACE MENG  
Member of Congress

/s/  
JEFFREY A. MERKLEY  
United States Senator
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/s/</th>
<th>/s/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAM SCHIFF</td>
<td>TERRI A. SEWELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBIO SIERES</td>
<td>TINA SMITH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>United States Senator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARREN SOTO</td>
<td>MARK TAKANO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENNIE G. THOMPSON</td>
<td>RASHIDA TLAIB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RITCHIE TORRES</td>
<td>JUAN VARGAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ</td>
<td>RAPHAEL WARNOCK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>United States Senator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN</td>
<td>PETER WELCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
i Education Department Responses to Data Request by Senator Warren, April 2, 2021 (Apr 2, 2021) Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren

ii Survey: Huge majority of student loan borrowers not financially secure enough to resume payments, Student Debt Crisis Center https://studentdebtcrisis.org/student-debt-covid-survey-4/

iii Id


xi Id