

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2025

Linda McMahon  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

We write regarding the Trump Administration’s decision to slash the capacity of Federal Student Aid (FSA) to handle student aid complaints, while reportedly “actively working to reduce the number of complaints filed.”<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the Department of Education (ED) appears to be abandoning the millions of parents, students, and borrowers who rely on a functioning federal student aid system to lower education costs.

On March 4, 2025, Politico reported that ED “fired eight out of 21 people who handled complaints submitted” on FSA’s website.<sup>2</sup> One week later, ED took the unprecedented step of purging half of its own employees, including by making “severe” employment cuts at the FSA office responsible for addressing student aid complaints.<sup>3</sup> These complaints include inquiries into technical difficulties with FAFSA applications, issues with student loan repayment, and other problem areas with high financial stakes for countless American families.<sup>4</sup> FSA received nearly 300,000 such complaints in Fiscal Year 2024, 91 percent of which were submitted online.<sup>5</sup>

ED also reportedly intends to remove the “Submit a Complaint” button from FSA’s website.<sup>6</sup> Troublingly, a senior ED employee wrote in an internal email that the removal of the button “is already underway” and that “this change would help decrease contact center volume and the

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<sup>1</sup> Inside Higher Ed, “Education Department Lays Off Nearly Half of Staff,” Liam Knox, Jessica Blake, and Katherine Knott, March 11, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/03/11/education-department-reduce-staff-half>; POLITICO Pro, “Education Department shrinks staff that fields student aid complaints,” Rebecca Carballo, March 4, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/03/education-department-shrinks-staff-that-fields-student-aid-complaints-00210264>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Inside Higher Ed, “Education Department Lays Off Nearly Half of Staff,” Liam Knox, Jessica Blake, and Katherine Knott, March 11, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/03/11/education-department-reduce-staff-half>.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Student Aid, “Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report,” November 14, 2024, p.132, <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/fy2024-fsa-annual-report.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> POLITICO Pro, “Education Department shrinks staff that fields student aid complaints,” Rebecca Carballo, March 4, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/03/education-department-shrinks-staff-that-fields-student-aid-complaints-00210264>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

number of complaints that [FSA] receives.”<sup>7</sup> Even more troublingly, this official called this attempt to make it more difficult for borrowers to file complaints “an overall win.”<sup>8</sup>

Reducing FSA’s capacity to resolve complaints while also impeding the submission of complaints will have dire consequences for individuals seeking assistance from ED. ED’s actions will hurt parents trying to understand how to submit the FAFSA correctly so that they can afford to send their child to college,<sup>9</sup> veterans whose loan repayment status has been processed incorrectly due to their deployment,<sup>10</sup> and students whose aid is being improperly withheld by predatory for-profit schools.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, each year ED refers thousands of complaints related to student loan scams to state attorneys general.<sup>12</sup> Weakening FSA’s complaint system will impair the government’s ability to crack down on these scams, leaving borrowers at greater risk of being cheated out of their money.

In addition, ED’s actions will make it more difficult for FSA to uncover problems in the federal student aid system and adjust policy to address them. Every year, FSA produces a report analyzing thousands of complaints from parents, students, and borrowers and making policy recommendations in response.<sup>13</sup> Hampering the FSA complaint system does nothing to increase government efficiency and instead will make it *more* difficult for policymakers to create a better-functioning, more efficient federal aid system for families.

ED should immediately restore all fired FSA employees responsible for reviewing student aid complaints and refrain from taking any measures to deter the submission of complaints. Parents, students, and borrowers should have access to a well-functioning federal student aid system that reliably lowers education costs. In light of ED’s disturbing decisions regarding FSA’s complaint system, we request you provide answers to the following questions by April 2, 2025:

1. Do you believe it should be ED’s responsibility to review and resolve complaints regarding the federal student aid system? If not, whose responsibility do you believe it should be?
2. Why did ED choose to fire employees charged with reviewing financial aid complaints?
  - a. Which individuals were involved in making this decision?
  - b. How many workers were fired? What percentage of the workers responsible for reviewing financial aid complaints remain?
  - c. Which classes or categories of workers were fired (e.g., Special Government Employee, Competitive Service, Senior Executive Service)?
  - d. Did ED evaluate the extent to which firing these employees would affect its capability to process student aid complaints in a timely manner? If so, what were the results of this evaluation?

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Federal Student Aid, “Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report,” November 14, 2024, p.139, <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/fy2024-fsa-annual-report.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* pp. 145-146.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* pp. 140-141.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* pp.128, 157-159.


- e. What is the size of FSA’s current backlog of complaints?
  - f. Given the number of personnel reviewing complaints and the pace at which they are doing so, how much time does ED expect it will take FSA to work through this backlog after these firings?
3. How does impeding ED’s capacity to help parents navigate the federal student aid system align with your stated goal of “empower[ing] all parents to choose an excellent education for their children”?<sup>14</sup>
  4. Does ED have plans to fire any additional FSA employees who hold roles related to the FSA complaint system or who process the claims of borrowers who were allegedly defrauded by their schools? If so, please describe those plans.
  5. What was the role of Elon Musk and/or Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) in the firings of FSA employees?
  6. According to Politico, a senior ED employee wrote in an email that “Removing the 'Submit a Complaint' button on Studentaid.gov is already underway.”<sup>15</sup> However, an ED spokesperson stated that the button is “just moving from top of the webpage page down to the footer” and will be renamed but “used for the same purpose.”<sup>16</sup>
    - a. What accounts for this discrepancy? Does ED plan to remove the button or move it to the bottom of the page?
    - b. If ED plans to remove the button, why has ED chosen to stop individuals from submitting complaints to FSA?
    - c. If ED plans to move the button to the bottom of the page, did it do so to “decrease contact center volume and the number of complaints” received by FSA,<sup>17</sup> as the ED employee wrote? If so, why does ED want to deter individuals from submitting complaints to FSA?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Secretary McMahon: Our Department’s Final Mission,” Secretary Linda McMahon, March 3, 2025, <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/speech/secretary-mcmahon-our-departments-final-mission>.

<sup>15</sup> POLITICO Pro, “Education Department shrinks staff that fields student aid complaints,” Rebecca Carballo, March 4, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/03/education-department-shrinks-staff-that-fields-student-aid-complaints-00210264>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



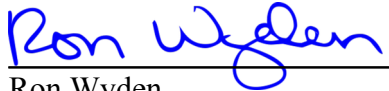
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



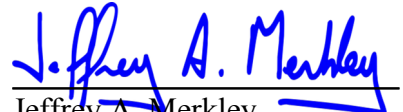
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



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