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September 6, 2017

Secretary Betsy DeVos
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

On behalf of the higher education associations listed below, we share your concern for the well-being of people impacted by Hurricane Harvey and those who are facing comparable devastation from Hurricane Irma. The impact on daily lives and property is substantial, and those affected will face incredible challenges in the aftermath of these powerful storms.

We are grateful that the Department has acted quickly to inform our colleges and universities—and their students and families—of the relief they can anticipate with respect to administering the federal student financial assistance programs on campus. The guidance you have provided will help the region’s efforts to recover from these terrible disasters.

Beyond this guidance, we believe there is another way the Department can assist the students and institutions impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. The campus-based programs’ general provisions regulation provides you with the discretion to reallocate unexpended funds in the Federal Supplemental Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) program “in a manner that best carries out the purposes of the FSEOG program.” We ask that you identify and prioritize the affected institutions, whose students are most in need of additional grant assistance, for reallocated FSEOG funds. Many families in these regions will soon experience—if they have not already—reduced and indeed even lost wages. These families’ college students would certainly satisfy the statutory “exceptional need” criterion for receipt of FSEOG awards.

We are aware that this year’s reallocation process has already begun, and that these funds must be obligated by September 30. However, the Department faced similar process and time constraints in its responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Twelve years ago the Department was able to reallocate unused FSEOG funds among affected institutions in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas in a timely fashion, thus enabling many students to continue their college educations.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Terry W. Hartle
Senior Vice President

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On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators