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COMMITTEE ON
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REFORM

COMMITTEE ON
STANDARDS OF OFFICIAL
CONDUCT

May 18, 2009

Chairman George Miller
House Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller,

Knowing of your concern about the Family Federal Education Loan (FFEL) Program, I would like to share with you how important this program is to my state. Not-for-profit and state agencies who participate in the FFEL Program, including those in Vermont, provide vital services that are not provided by the Direct Loan Program and which will be lost at a time when students and families need this assistance most.

I share your commitment to ensuring that all students have access to education or job training after high school. In Vermont, the fastest growing job opportunities require post-secondary education. The State of Vermont, through the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), has initiated award winning programs to help first-generation students and their families connect their career goals to education and training opportunities and make the transition from high school to college.

These programs serve as a national model for other states looking to better serve first-generation and middle income families. VSAC counselors provide career and education counseling services in virtually every middle school and high school in the state. National data suggests that first-generation students have about a 25 percent chance of pursuing education or training after college. VSAC has successfully increased these numbers in Vermont to nearly 52 percent.

As part of their effort to further improve what is widely recognized as a very successful program, VSAC just completed one of the first longitudinal studies of a cohort of Talent Search and GEAR-UP students. Students who participate in VSAC's outreach programs have a college continuation rate of 87 percent. More importantly, the two-year/six-year college graduation rates for these students is nearly 60 percent. In short, outreach programs can effectively eliminate the difference between first generation students and their peers whose parents had access to college.

Because Vermont's financial situation prevents the state from contributing to VSAC, one hundred percent of the funds used to support these programs come from student loan revenues. Elimination of the FFEL program will result in the termination of these programs and will cost tens of thousands of first-generation Vermont students the opportunity to pursue education after high school.

I believe that it is possible to preserve the role and programs of not-for-profit and state agency FFEL participants while accomplishing many, if not all, of the reforms you hope to achieve. I look forward to working with you to achieve the goal we both share: helping students access higher education opportunities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Welch", written in a cursive style.

Peter Welch
Member of Congress