

# United States Senate

May 22, 2017

COMMITTEES  
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND  
FORESTRY  
APPROPRIATIONS  
ENERGY AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
INDIAN AFFAIRS

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I write as a follow-up to previous letters to urge you to utilize your discretion and do whatever necessary to review fiscal year 2017 Upward Bound grant applications that were denied due to minor formatting issues that originated from standards established by the Obama administration. I request that a phone call with you be scheduled as quickly as possible to discuss the status of these applications. Whether this issue is addressed by using existing funds, redirecting U.S. Department of Education resources, or other means, resolving this issue in a timely fashion is imperative.

For example, the University of Montana submitted a grant application that was denied due to one page being single-spaced instead of double-spaced. This denial was not due to the merits of the application but based solely off of an irrelevant formatting issue. Additionally, this was done without any prior notification or any opportunity provided for the University of Montana to correct the error.

As you know, the fiscal year 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Omnibus) provided an increase of \$50 million to TRIO programs and also provided savings by prohibiting funding for a TRIO demonstration project. This substantial increase, combined with report language in the Omnibus directing your Department to provide sufficient flexibility to review applications denied due to formatting concerns, should provide you with the necessary resources to review impacted applications without placing already accepted applications at a disadvantage.

While the need for having formatting guidelines and standards is important, I do appreciate the fact that you have issued a Department-wide directive to ensure that this type of denial will not happen in the future. That being said, the directive does not resolve the issue currently facing Upward Bound at the University of Montana and dozens of other institutions across the country. Denying applications and endangering program funding for minor formatting errors without providing an opportunity for a correction is unacceptable.

I urge you to take the necessary steps to review the applications denied due to minor formatting issues in a prompt manner. I look forward to your response and staying in close contact on this critically important issue.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES  
United States Senator