

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta,

We write to request that you delay the implementation of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) under the Military Tuition Assistance (TA) Program. The Department of Defense has issued a deadline of January 1, 2012 for institutions of higher education to sign the MOU in order to become or remain eligible for participation in the TA program. While we applaud your intent to fight fraud and abuse against members of the armed services, we believe that changes need to be made to the MOU in order to avoid significant disruption in the provision of educational benefits and to make critical improvements to its content.

We have strong concerns that your intent to ensure quality education for members of the armed services may be undermined by moving forward with the MOU as drafted, as it fails to address many of the key issues facing our military students, and at the same time discourages institutions from continuing to participate in the TA program. The MOU also fails to address many legitimate concerns that veterans and military service organizations have about the recruitment, enrollment, and support provided to members of the armed forces, their families and veterans.

We also believe that the MOU was drafted in such a way as to infringe on the educational integrity and academic plans of our nation's colleges and universities. As such, the MOU has failed to gain support from many of the nation's best colleges and universities.

We respectfully request that you act quickly to delay implementation of the current MOU and work with us, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Shinseki, representatives of institutions of higher education and representatives of service members and veterans to develop a new MOU that provides proper safeguards against fraud, waste and abuse, strengthens oversight, and, most importantly, ensures that service members can choose the best institution that meets their academic and training needs and offers critical academic and support services.

We are confident that we all share the goal of empowering service members to make the best choice about their education and training for themselves without creating unnecessary barriers for the participation of our nation's colleges and universities. Working together, we can ensure that service members receive the education they deserve and protect both students and taxpayers.

Due to the time-sensitive nature of this matter, we would appreciate a response no later than December 16.



Sincerely,



Kay R. Hagan

B. J. Sanders

James J. ...

Kay Bend

Kay Bailey Hatcher

Michael B. Eiji

Sally Claublin

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Patrick Leahy

Mike Crapo

Dir Durlin

Donna Petersen

Chuck Sch

Ron Wyden

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Tommy Wilson

John J. Kennedy

Bob Casey, Jr.

Richard Shelby

Jim Risch

Patty Murray

~~John Barrasso~~

John Barrasso

Clayton K. Kinn

Al Franken

Frank R. Lautenberg

Jeffrey P. Babin
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Sheldon Brown

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Robert Menendez

Jeffrey A. Merkley

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Chuck Grassley

Mark Udall

John Cooney

Kurt P. Brown

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Jon Tester

Tom Carper

Caine McCasill

Jay Byrnes

Herb Kohl

John Boozman

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Mark R. Warner