

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2024

The Honorable Miguel Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

We write today regarding the Department of Education's (the Department) ongoing implementation of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. Each year, about 17 million students fill out the FAFSA form as a first step to accessing critical financial aid to help cover the skyrocketing costs of higher education.

In 2020, Congress passed the bipartisan *FAFSA Simplification Act* to make the federal student financial aid process more efficient and straightforward. The *FAFSA Simplification Act* directed the Department to streamline the application form and make long overdue updates to the formulas that assess a students' financial need. According to the Department, as a result of this law, the 2024-2025 FAFSA form will ensure 610,000 more students from low-income backgrounds will be eligible to receive a federal Pell Grant, and 1.5 million more students will be eligible to receive a maximum Pell award.

Implementation of these changes was a significant undertaking, one that the Department has had to do with less funding than it anticipated would be needed to complete the job correctly and on time. The Department released the new FAFSA form to the public, incrementally, beginning December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, nearly three months later than usual. But, in a sign of how pivotal the FAFSA is, to date, an estimated 3.6 million FAFSA forms have already been successfully submitted. Even though the newly released FAFSA form did not initially include legally mandated adjustments to the Income Protection Allowance (IPA), the Department's recent corrective action to implement those adjustments will result in \$1.8 billion in additional financial aid for students. We are supportive of the Department's decision to make these adjustments in the updated form, but were disappointed to hear these adjustments would lead to even further delays in this year's FAFSA processing.

Any delays in financial aid processing will most impact the students that need aid most, including many students of color, students from mixed status families, students from rural backgrounds, students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, first-generation students, and students from underserved communities. For institutions to support students' ability to make informed decisions about their future, they need clear guidance and resources from the Department immediately on any and all next steps.

We were pleased to see the recent announcement of the Department's plans to provide additional resources and supports for under-resourced high schools and colleges to assist their students with the FAFSA form, and to deploy federal staff to support aid efforts. We urge the Department to distribute these resources and tools to schools and institutions of higher education as quickly as possible, and to clearly communicate with stakeholders about the ways to access these resources and how these new resources will support students, families, and student aid administrators in submitting and processing the FAFSA form.

We write today to ask for more clarity on how the Department plans to communicate any further delays in FAFSA processing, and how the Department intends to minimize the potential impact on students and families so they can make the most informed decision possible about their futures, including through providing prompt, clear timelines.

We kindly request that the Department provide responses to the following set of questions:

1. The Department has indicated it will send IPA-adjusted and finalized FAFSA data in early March, it is imperative that this data is sent to institutions as early in March as possible. On what date in March does the Department intend to send finalized information to relevant stakeholders? When will the Department disperse its test data to institutions of higher education so that they can test their infrastructure and best prepare to create financial aid packages for students? How and when will the Department communicate with relevant stakeholders if this intended plan changes?
2. How is the Department communicating with relevant stakeholders, such as students, families, and college financial aid professionals, in a timely and culturally responsive manner about the ongoing FAFSA delay and ongoing issues for some students, including students from mixed status families, in submitting the form? How often will any supportive materials be updated to reflect the most up to date information, and how can stakeholders access this information?
3. In light of the repeated delays in institutions receiving relevant aid information, as well as ongoing issues for some students in submitting the form, will the Department consider reducing the rate of students selected for additional verification to ensure students do not face further barriers to receiving the aid they are due?
4. How is the Department working to ensure all under resourced high schools and colleges that need assistance in FAFSA processing are aware of and have access to the resources offered by the Department to assist them?
5. Is the Department working with state aid agencies and other relevant stakeholders to ensure timely processing and delivery of other forms of financial aid such as scholarship or state aid for students?
6. Will the Department ask states, and colleges and universities to relax any admissions or scholarship deadlines to ensure students have ample time to apply for additional aid and make informed decisions about their futures?
7. Are any of the implementation challenges caused by the lack of resources? Detail whether there are specific requests that Congress can respond to in order to help address related issues moving forward.

The recent announcements from the Department were a welcome first step in addressing the many challenges students, counselors, aid administrators, and relevant stakeholders are facing in accessing, submitting, and processing the new FAFSA form. But now, it is imperative that we all work together to ensure no student falls through the cracks or faces unnecessary challenges in accessing the aid they are due.

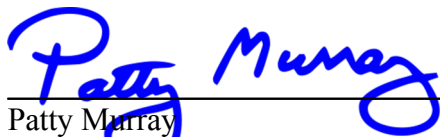
Sincerely,



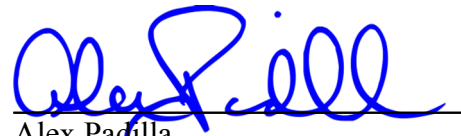
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator  
Chairman, Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, and Pensions



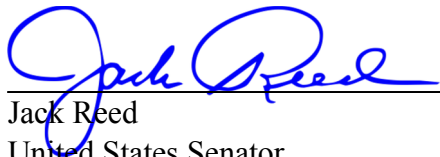
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Education and the Workforce



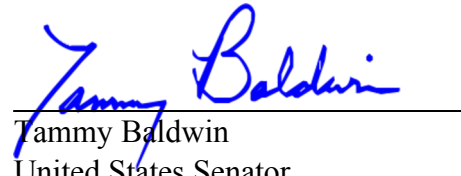
Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



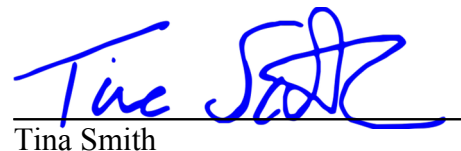
Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



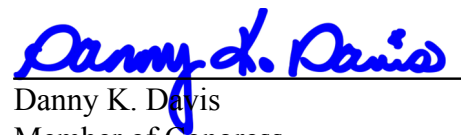
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



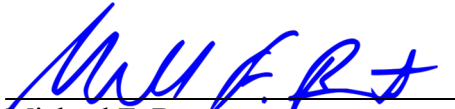
Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress

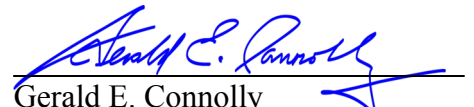


Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



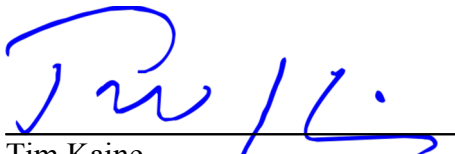
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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



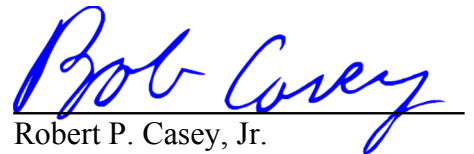
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Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



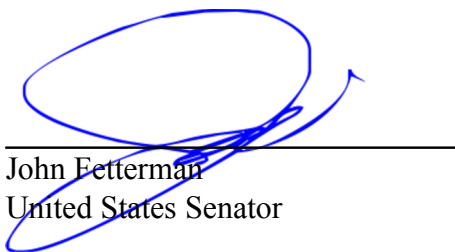
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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator




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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator




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John Fetterman  
United States Senator




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Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



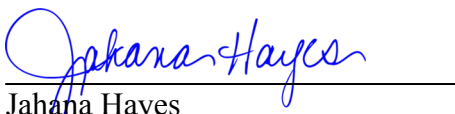
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



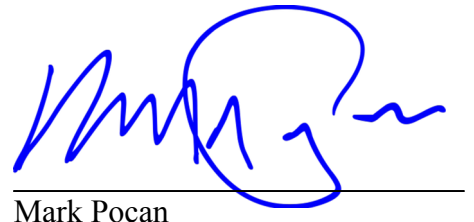
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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress

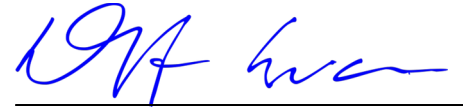


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Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress



Sheria Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



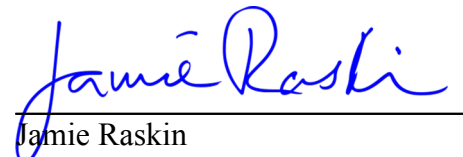
Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan  
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress



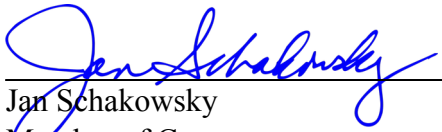
Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

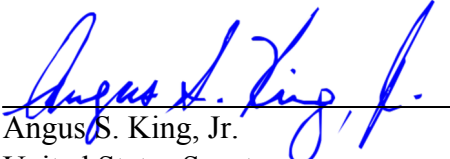


Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator





Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator


  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

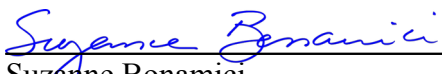
  
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

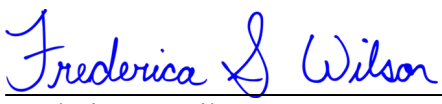
  
John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator

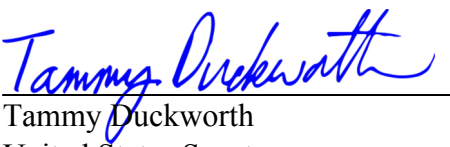
  
Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress

  
Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

  
Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

  
MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress

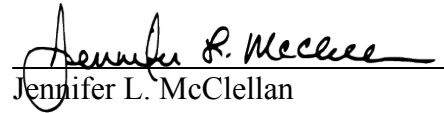
  
Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee  
on Higher Education and  
Workforce Development

  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



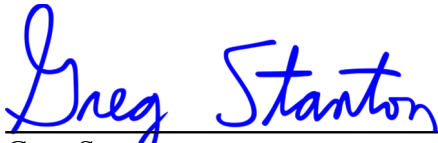
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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



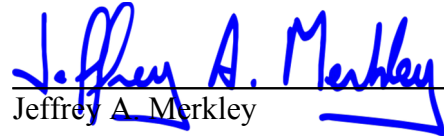
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Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress



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Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



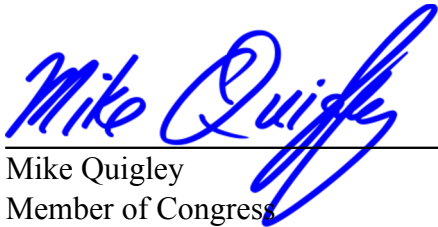
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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



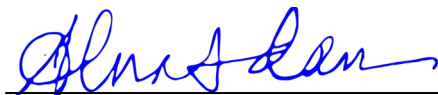
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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator




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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress

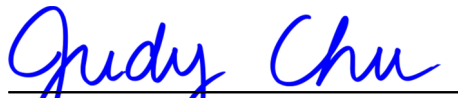


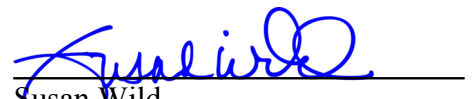
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Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
Sean Casten  
Member of Congress


  
Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

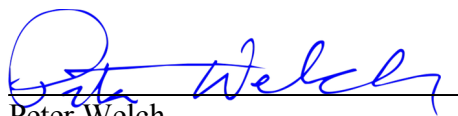
  
Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

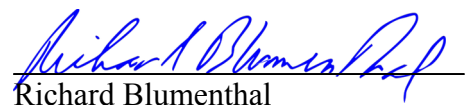
  
Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress

  
Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

  
Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress

  
Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

  
Peter Welch  
United States Senator

  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

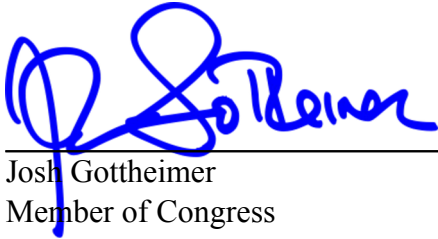




Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress



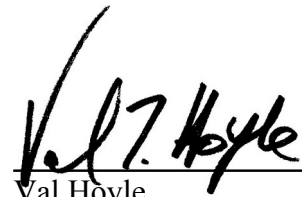
Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress



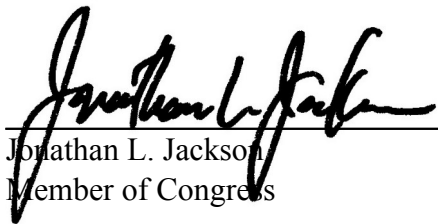
Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



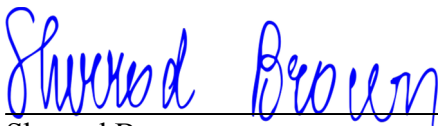
Val Hoyle  
Member of Congress



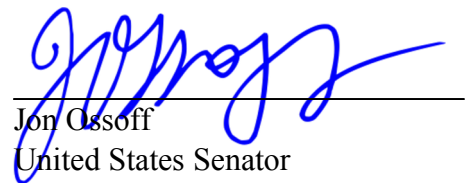
Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman  
Member of Congress



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



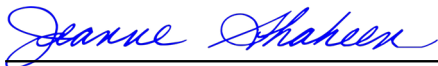
Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



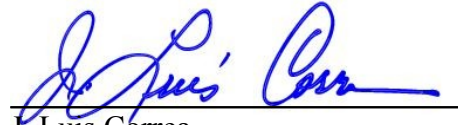
Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



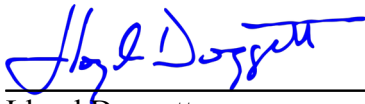
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress



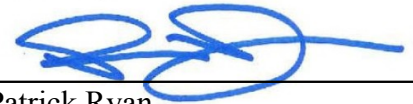
Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



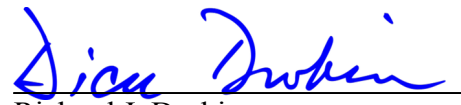
Susie Lee  
Member of Congress



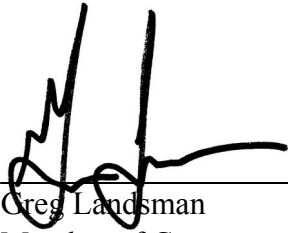
Patrick Ryan  
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

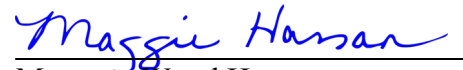


Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



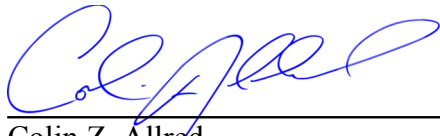
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Greg Landsman  
Member of Congress



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Maggie Hassan  
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



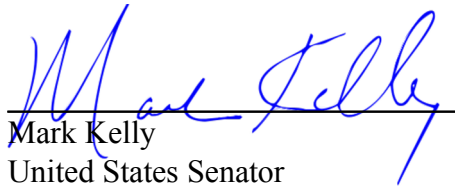
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Colin Z. Allred  
Member of Congress



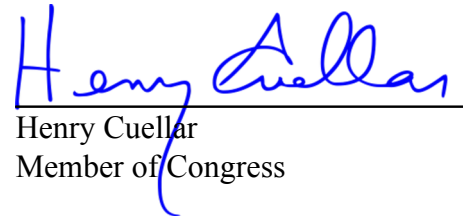
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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



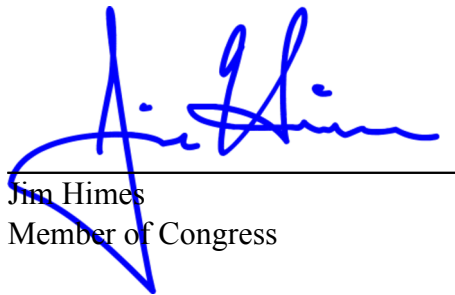
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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



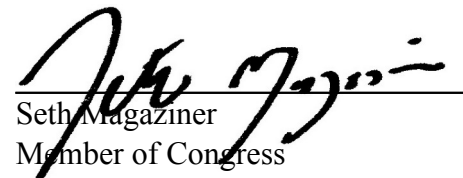
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Henry Cuellar  
Member of Congress



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Jim Himes  
Member of Congress



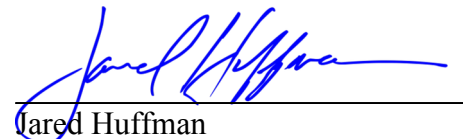
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Seth Magaziner  
Member of Congress



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Tony Cardenas  
Member of Congress

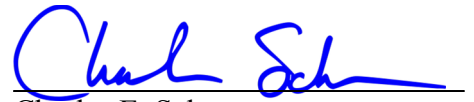


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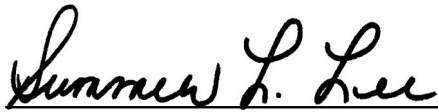
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



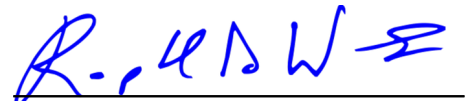
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



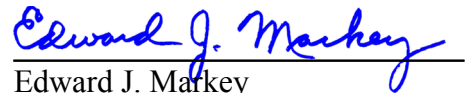
Summer Lee  
Member of Congress



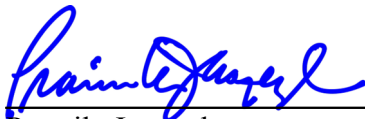
Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



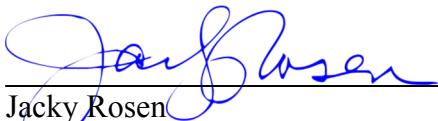
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



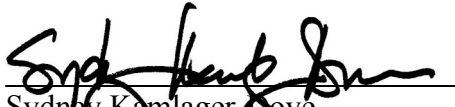
Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

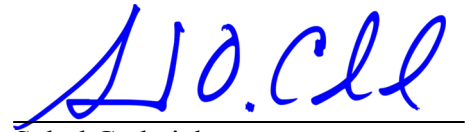


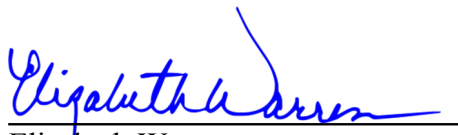
Jacky Rosen  
U.S. Senator

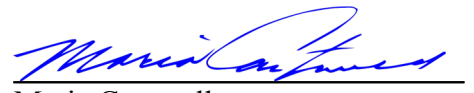


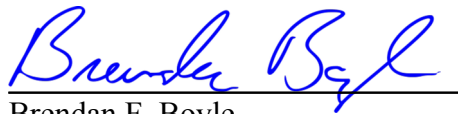
Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

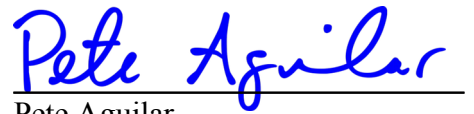
  
Sydney Kamlager-Dove  
Member of Congress


  
Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

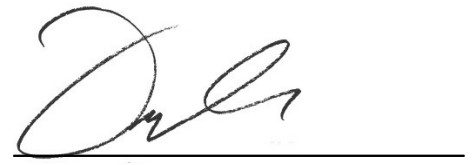
  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

  
Brendan F. Boyle  
Member of Congress

  
Pete Aguilar  
Member of Congress

  
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

  
Troy A. Carter, Sr.  
Member of Congress