



April 9, 2024

Congressman Joe Courtney
55 Main Street, Suite 250
Norwich, CT 06360

Dear Congressman Courtney,

You are, it is certain, aware of the issues stemming from the updated FAFSA roll-out, and the difficulties and uncertainty these issues have created for students, families, and institutions, alike. As you participate in tomorrow's hearing about the problems with the roll-out, I hope you will keep in mind its impacts to Mitchell College, its students, and potential students.

The simplifying of the forms which allow access to aid for students is an ambitious and worthwhile undertaking. We applaud the Department of Education's efforts to streamline and simplify the process for the students it aims to serve. However, the delays, errors, and changes have had significant impact to Mitchell College's ability to enroll students for the coming fall.

Mitchell is a small nonprofit college, averaging about 500 students per year, meaning that even small fluctuations in enrollment are considerable. Enrolled and deposited students leading into an academic year inform institutional planning, staffing and budgeting. In most years, the release of Financial aid packages results in decisions from students, but in this year, students are hesitant to deposit or commit without knowing what financial aid will be available to them. The student's uncertainty becomes the institution's uncertainty.

We appreciate the Department's efforts to help institutions get financial aid packages to students expediently, considering the delays that we have already seen. This may benefit larger or elite institutions, those with access to CSS profiles, or those who have fewer Pell eligible students. But for a small college like Mitchell, where 95% of students receive financial aid, with 61.1% of our Connecticut students, and 52.1% of our overall population being Pell eligible in the 2023-2024 academic year, it is not feasible for us to package financial aid offers for students prior to receiving reprocessed, *correct* ISIRs.

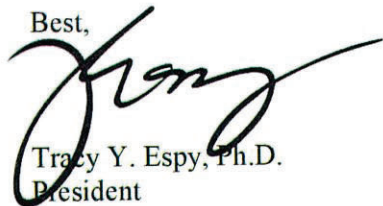
Accuracy matters. Each student should receive every bit of aid available to him or her calculated with a correct ISIR. It is equally important that a student not receive more than he or she would with a correct ISIR. Could a student embark on their college career based on the aid they receive, only to find next year, they are eligible for less, and cannot continue? What guarantee does an institution have that no penalty or consequence will follow an award based on a faulty ISIR?

The uncertainty both students and institutions are facing as errors in the FAFSA are rectified are distressing, and costly. Mitchell College, while enjoying a 40% increase in applications year-to-date over this time last year, has seen a 67% decrease in deposits. The hesitancy created by long delays and changing timelines of the roll-out have impacted the College's expected enrollment to a great degree. We hope that you will consider, and encourage your colleagues, to set aside funding to offset losses from declines in enrollment related to the FAFSA roll-out in this this initial year of its implementation. Such funding would truly help a small institution like Mitchell College weather the impacts of decisions being made at the federal level, that we feel deeply.

Once the FAFSA is functioning as intended, institutions can send out financial aid packages for students to confidently accept, we believe we will see deposits and enrollment continue to rise.

Thank you, Congressman Courtney, for taking the time to consider Mitchell College and how it is being affected by failures in the FAFSA roll-out. Should you wish to talk further, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy", written in a cursive style.

Tracy Y. Espy, Ph.D.
President