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December 14, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Avenue
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I write to ask that you take immediate action to better secure sensitive information that students submit online through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

According to a recent media report, it is possible for identity thieves to view sensitive personal and financial information entered by students into the FAFSA website, including information about their parents, merely by inputting a person's first and last name, date of birth and Social Security Number.

The sensitive data apparently includes net worth, adjusted gross income, investment and retirement information, child support information, and participation in programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

I understand that the FAFSA website prompts students to create a "save key" which is intended to protect from unauthorized access student data that has been saved as part of the application process, but not yet submitted for processing. However, according to that same media report, the save key can be bypassed merely with knowledge of the student's zip code.

Given the sensitivity of the data collected during the FAFSA application, it is paramount that this information be protected from identity thieves. To that end, I urge you to direct your staff to examine the existing security controls protecting the FAFSA website, and to consider additional cybersecurity protections, particularly for data associated with partially completed applications. At the very least, subsequent logins to the FAFSA website should require two-factor authentication, either by sending an email to an address on file for an applicant, or using a phishing-resistant method of two-factor authentication, such as a U2F token.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Chris Soghoian on my staff.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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