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COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

November 16, 2015

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The Department of Education, through the Office of Federal Student Aid, determines whether institutions of higher education are eligible for federal student aid through a certification process. Certification requires, among other qualifications, accreditation and state recognition.¹ Institutions are preliminarily certified before they are granted full certification.

In fiscal year 2014, institutions managed nearly \$134 billion in federal student aid.² The Department of Education acts as the gatekeeper of these funds, by ensuring that institutions are eligible, financially responsible, and administratively capable. The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations requests that the Government Accountability Office review the Department of Education's certification process, to assess how the Department oversees and monitors compliance with certification requirements and how it addresses violations of program requirements.

I request that you address the following questions in your review:

1. How does the Department initially approve schools for provisional certification to administer federal student aid programs?
2. How does the Department monitor schools with provisional certification and ensure that they are sufficiently well run to receive full certification?
3. To what extent does the Department rely on accreditors and states for oversight and monitoring?
4. How rigorous is the process to become fully certified, and under what circumstances are institutions not certified?

¹ Department of Education, 2015-2016 Federal Student Aid Handbook (Oct. 27, 2015).

² Government Accountability Office, *Higher Education: Education Should Strengthen Oversight of Schools and Accreditors* (Jan. 2015) (GAO-15-59).

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5. If institutions fail to achieve full certification, what are their options for reapplying?
6. How effective is the Department's certification and recertification process in terms of identifying schools having difficulties administering federal student aid and addressing identified problems?

I appreciate your assistance with this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Sarah Garcia with my Subcommittee staff at (202) 224-5602. Please send any official correspondence relating to this request to the Subcommittee's chief clerk at Kelsey_Stroud@hsgac.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: Rob Portman
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations