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February 12, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On January 16, 2014 the White House convened a summit with more than 100 college and university leaders and 40 non-profit organizations to discuss opportunities to expand access to higher education for low-income students. We share the goal of strengthening federal policy to ensure all students, regardless of income, have the opportunity to access and complete a postsecondary education. Both Congress and the administration have a responsibility to help students understand the value of postsecondary institutions and programs that can lead to success in the workforce.

Leading up to the summit, it was widely reported that college and university leaders were invited to attend only after committing to a series of pledges designed to increase low-income access and persistence on campus. Institutions made promises in several areas, including expanding college advising, improving remedial education, increasing the pool of low-income applicants in admissions, and matching disadvantaged students to the institutions that best meet their unique needs. These are all laudable actions consistent with one of our primary goals for the upcoming reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* – to increase college accessibility, affordability, and completion.

As you may know, the committee has held a series of hearings in preparation to reform the nation's postsecondary education system, including a recent Higher Education and Workforce Training Subcommittee hearing entitled, "*Keeping College within Reach: Sharing Best Practices for Serving Low-Income and First Generation Students.*" As we continue moving forward with our efforts to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act*, we hope to work in partnership with the administration to craft policies that will strengthen the law for students, families, teachers, and college leaders.

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However, your recent threats to circumvent Congress are a major obstacle in this process. During the summit, you stated, "I've got a pen to take executive actions where Congress won't, and I've got a telephone to rally folks around the country on this mission." We are disappointed the administration would threaten to subvert Congress on higher education policy, especially considering the fact that Department of Education has failed to release a comprehensive proposal to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act*. Instead, the department continues to propose prescriptive, one-size-fits-all policies that not only ignore the realities of our nation's diverse higher education system, but are also strongly opposed by many higher education stakeholders.

To better understand the administration's actions, we request a briefing by February 25, 2014 from the Domestic Policy Council to hear your plans for additional executive actions, including future White House summits, and other steps you are considering to address the nation's higher education challenges. We would also like to know how the administration chose the group of invitees for the recent summit, as well as the steps the administration took to ensure the attendees represented all sectors of the higher education community, including those institutions serving low-income students.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



JOHN KLINE

Chairman

Committee on Education and the Workforce



VIRGINIA FOXX

Chairwoman

Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Training