

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

As strong supporters of the Federal TRIO Programs, we have significant concerns about the recently published applications for the Fiscal Year 2026 TRIO Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) grant competitions. The grant structure outlined in the applications reflect a dramatic shift in mission and redirect funds from the core purpose of the Talent Search and EOC programs. Given this, as well as the current time constraints surrounding the competitions, we respectfully request that the Administration rescind the applications and work with Congress to revise and reissue the applications to protect the integrity of the Federal TRIO Programs. In taking the time to rectify this matter, we also request that the Administration ensure that there is no lapse in funding for any Talent Search or EOC projects, which are scheduled to expire on August 31, 2026.

While all TRIO programs support postsecondary access in general, it is evident from the required services stipulated by Congress that the purpose of TRIO is to promote college awareness, preparation, and completion for low-income, potential first-generation college students. The Higher Education Act requires that, in working with students in grades 6 through 12, Talent Search programs not only provide “high quality academic tutoring services,” but also “assistance in preparing for college entrance examinations and completing college admission applications” as well as support in identifying appropriate financial aid and scholarships. (20 U.S.C. § 1070a-12(b).) Similarly, the law requires that TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers assist adult learners in re-entering the education pipeline by arming them with the supports necessary to succeed, including academic, admissions, and financial aid assistance. (20 U.S.C. 1070a-16(a)). Yet, the notices inviting applications make it clear that, in order to successfully secure a grant in the pending competitions, applicants must shift their programmatic focus to center around registered apprenticeships, work-based learning, and career and technical education programs.

TRIO was intended to be, and has always been, an education program that helps prepare students for higher education, and ultimately, the workforce. As you know, Congress has enacted provisions to support and expand workforce training and apprenticeship through other efforts, including the creation of Workforce Pell in the One Big, Beautiful Bill Act (PL-119-21).

We are also concerned that the Talent Search and EOC applications massively restructure the programs in ways that greatly disadvantage current grantees. This is done in two ways. First, they broaden grant eligibility to a new category of applicants (state educational agencies, state workforce development agencies/boards, and state higher education agencies) *and* awards

them five additional points under a competitive preference priority. Second, and more disturbing, the applications fail to guarantee that current grantees that are performing well will receive renewal grant awards that are at least equal to their previous grant awards, which is a standard practice in TRIO grant competitions. Instead, they allow state-level applicants to apply for multi-million dollar awards that have the potential to absorb the entire allocation for these programs. For example, there are currently 517 Talent Search programs in virtually every state providing services to over 322,000 students. The structure outlined in the application would shrink the total number of Talent Search grantees by at least two-thirds. Similarly, the EOC application proposes to shrink the number of grants from 160 to just 55. This will have devastating consequences for communities across the nation.

Further, the applications' proposal to reduce the per-student cost to just \$500 in Talent Search and \$280 in EOC. While these have always been low-cost student programs, this configuration does not account for the rigorous, labor-intensive process of providing direct service to students or the required process of tracking their long-term success following their participation in the program.

TRIO programs have a long track record of success. According to the Department of Education's 2022 Grantee-Level Performance Report, 68 percent of Talent Search participants enrolled in a postsecondary education program immediately after high school graduation – a sharp contrast to the 56 percent of high school students from the bottom income quartile who enrolled in a postsecondary education program immediately after high school during this same time. Meanwhile, EOC plays a critical role in assisting adult learners in preparing for, enrolling in, and paying for college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2021, 21 percent of full-time undergraduates at 2-year public institutions were aged 25 years or older. During the 2018-2019 program year, more than half (59 percent) of “college-ready” EOC participants enrolled in institutions of higher learning; similarly, a recent assessment of EOC found that 73 percent of eligible participants (i.e., high school seniors, high school graduates, high school equivalency graduates, postsecondary dropouts or transfers, etc.) applied for college admission. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service. (2022). Fast Facts Report for Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 2018-19, Washington, D.C.)

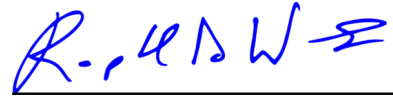
For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Administration withdraw the applications for the Talent Search and EOC grant competitions. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to address these challenges in order to reissue the applications. We also wish to ensure there is no lapse in funding for current Talent Search and EOC grantees. Ideally, the agency would extend all current grant awards by one year in order to allow these challenges to be addressed adequately. (There is precedent for extending grants as the Department has done for TRIO on multiple occasions.)

We all care about America's students – and particularly those from low-income families who seek to change the economic trajectories of their families. Let us work together to avoid irreversible damage to the students, families, and communities that rely on these critical programs. Thank you for your attention to this request, and we look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



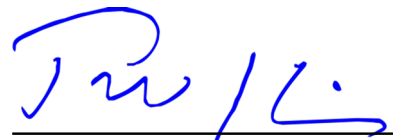
James E. Risch
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



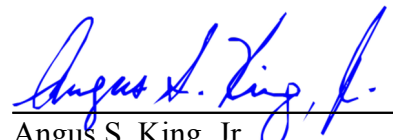
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