

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

June 13, 2017

Secretary Betsy DeVos
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I am writing to express my deep concern with the Department of Education's decision to reject the Upward Bound application at West Virginia State University and the McNair Scholars Program at West Virginia University because of two minor technicalities. In West Virginia, we have a lot of first time college students, many of whom come from low-income families that simply do not have the resources or experience to help their children navigate things like Advanced Placement classes, SAT tests, college applications, financial aid, and finally college itself. TRIO programs fill those voids and inspire students to achieve more than they ever thought was possible. That is why I am asking the Department to swiftly reverse its decision and allow these applications to be fairly considered.

On March 20, 2017, West Virginia State University (WVSU) received notification that the Department of Education would not consider its application for an Upward Bound grant. According to the Department, this decision was made because the itemized budget amount exceeded the amount requested on the application. On the Federal Budget Summary form, the institution requested the amount of \$509,622. However, in the narrative of the grant application, the itemized budget showed a total of \$509,726 which was \$104 over the requested amount. The difference was due to a typographical error in the part time personnel section of the itemized budget. Despite the typographical errors, the application never sought an amount above what WVSU was permitted to request.

On June 2, 2017, West Virginia University (WVU) received notification that the Department would not consider its application to reauthorize the McNair Scholars Program because of a \$2 rounding error on their application. The McNair Scholars Program prepares undergraduate students for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. The mistake was made because of a miscommunication to the program. The Federal Register stated that existing programs should ask for a budget that equals to the budget they received for the 2016-2017 year, which for WVU, is \$226,598.00. However, at all proposal writing training workshops, WVU was instructed that all applicants should write as if they were all new applicants,

which typically round to the nearest \$100. It is with the latter concept going into the grant writing process that WVU requested \$226,600.00. To allow a \$2 budget rounding error to end a program that has been in operation since 1999 would be failure of leadership.

As the Secretary of Education, it is your job to put the needs of students above bureaucratic red tape. That is why I implore you to immediately read and score the applications in accordance with the regulatory criteria applied to all other applications submitted in this competition. It is my understanding that the Department has made similar exceptions in the past under such circumstances. I urge you to again take a commonsense approach and offer these long-standing Upward Bound programs the opportunity to apply to continue to serve the students of West Virginia.

With warmest regards,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator