

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2018

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

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We write to express strong concern over your recent action to restore the federal recognition of the failed for-profit accreditor, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS). In Michigan, ACICS gave its stamp of approval to some of the most unscrupulous for-profit colleges. Former ACICS-accredited institutions, including ITT Educational Services, Inc. ("ITT Tech") and Corinthian Colleges, Inc. ("Corinthian"), left Michigan students saddled with debt and worthless credits and degrees, while costing taxpayers billions of dollars when these institutions collapsed. Given ACICS's clear record of failure to oversee these institutions, we request that the U.S. Department of Education ("Department") deny ACICS's petition to be a federally recognized accrediting agency.

Accreditation is critical to ensuring that only quality institutions are educating our nation's students. Federally recognized accreditors act as the gatekeepers for colleges and universities seeking to participate in federal student aid programs. Furthermore, certification from a federally recognized accreditor is a signal to potential students and the public that an institution has met rigorous standards and can provide a quality education that will set students on a path toward a rewarding career. Unfortunately, ACICS utterly failed at its primary duty by accrediting now-defunct institutions, such as Corinthian and ITT Tech.

In our state of Michigan, Corinthian operated campuses in Dearborn, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Southfield, enrolling over 5,000 students the year Corinthian collapsed. The Department found that Corinthian defrauded students by falsifying job placement data, and reported that over 12,000 former Corinthian students in Michigan were eligible to file for loan relief through borrower defense to repayment.

Following Corinthian's collapse, another ACICS-accredited institution-ITT Tech- was also investigated for deceptive practices and ultimately closed operations, leaving students in Michigan scrambling to transfer their credits to another institution or apply for loan relief through the Department. Both Corinthian and ITT Tech had been collectively investigated or sued by more than 20 state attorneys general, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Education for misrepresenting job placement rates and attendance records, suspect recruitment

practices, and deceptive advertising in the years leading up to their collapse. The Department also found that ACICS renewed the accreditation of another institution based in Michigan despite previously finding evidence of fraud and misappropriation of millions of dollars in federal student aid funds. These continued lapses in oversight and the harm caused to Michigan students is more than sufficient evidence to demonstrate that ACICS is not an accrediting agency worthy of the public's trust.

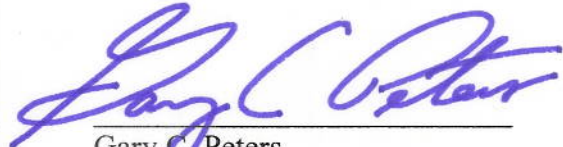
Even with this staggering evidence against ACICS, recently released emails under the Freedom of Information Act have shown that your Department is giving preferential treatment to ACICS and is quietly assisting the embattled accreditor with its application for renewal. This development is extremely troubling, given that the Department is now conducting a new review of ACICS and has invalidated the previous decision to deny recognition.

We urge you to side with Michigan students and taxpayers by denying ACICS's petition to be a federally recognized accrediting agency. You have a responsibility to uphold the integrity of our country's higher education system. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator