

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (FL-24)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"GAO Uncovers Biden-Harris FAFSA Failures GAO Uncovers Biden-Harris FAFSA Failures"

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Chairman Owens, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us here today.

We know that a college degree is the surest pathway to success in America.

And, for years, the Pell Grant has helped millions of students go to college, who otherwise may not have been able to go.

That is why, four years ago, we came together and passed the FAFSA Simplification Act, which aimed to streamline the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form and expand student aid eligibility.

Regrettably, the implementation of the law has been derailed by a series of avoidable mistakes made by the Department of Education, leading to delays and ongoing setbacks in the rollout of the new application.

It's frustrating because aside from the dozens of letters Congress has sent, this is not the first hearing we have had this year about this same issue.

I used to be a schoolteacher and principal by trade, and I served on the Miami-Dade County school board. I continue to dedicate myself to education by sending thousands of Black men and boys into college, building a new generation of husbands and fathers so I know how stressful the college application process is. Parents are frustrated at the FAFSA process and presidents alike are complaining to me.

"Our-want-to-be" somebody students, along with their families, have spent hours trying to reach someone at the Federal Student Aid, only to have their calls go unanswered.

Or, for those who have finally gotten through an agent, many have received incorrect information.

I empathize with the frustration of college advisors, who want to help students enroll in the upcoming school year, but they, too, have been left in the dark about what aid students are entitled to.

And, most of all, I am most upset that the delays and ongoing setbacks with FAFSA have meant that some of our "want-to-be-somebody" students have just decided not to go to college at all. That's have just given up.

Today's hearing isn't just about "who knew what" and "when did they know it," although we do need to get to the bottom of all of that.

This hearing is, at its core, about the students who may have been denied an opportunity because of the Department's mistakes and how we can ensure that the Department does not repeat those mistakes for the upcoming school year.

Time is of the essence, and students need answers now.

I am encouraged by some of the progress the Department has made to improve the FAFSA process.

But much more is needed to get this process back on track.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.