

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

December 9, 2016

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary King:

I write today to urge you to work with Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan to provide prompt federal student loan debt relief to approximately 3,600 Illinois students who were defrauded by Westwood College.

In 2012, Attorney General Madigan filed suit against Westwood College for using deceptive marketing to lure students into its criminal justice programs in violation of the Illinois Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act. According to evidence compiled by Attorney General Madigan, Westwood deceived Illinois students about the costs and accreditation of its criminal justice program and their prospects for employment upon completing the program. Westwood led Illinois students to believe that its criminal justice program was highly respected by employers and a sure ticket to a job in law enforcement. Unfortunately, when they graduated, students found out that Illinois law enforcement agencies did not recognize their Westwood education, leaving them with tens of thousands of dollars in student debt and no job.

Attorney General Madigan's suit and underlying evidence make clear that Westwood's deceptive practices give rise to a cause of action under Illinois law, thereby qualifying approximately 3,600 Westwood criminal justice students in Illinois to federal student loan relief under the Department's borrower defense to repayment regulation (34 C.F.R. § 685.206). I urge the Department to work with Attorney General Madigan to promptly provide loan discharges and notifications of discharge to those students identified by the Attorney General. Further, I encourage the Department to make these discharges available to students covered by the Attorney General's evidence without requiring the students to attest to reliance on any particular Westwood claim, given that such reliance is not required under the applicable state law.

Thank you for your consideration and your work to provide relief to students defrauded by Westwood and other for-profit colleges.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator