

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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May 16, 2014

Ms. Catherine Lhamon  
Assistant Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office for Civil Rights  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-1100

Dear Assistant Secretary Lhamon,

I am writing to formally request you end your baseless investigation into the Florida Bright Futures scholarship program. This is a race-blind merit-based, program that supports Florida's most promising students. The U.S. Department of Education has no legitimate legal basis for investigating such a program. Further, forcing bureaucratic changes in the parameters of eligibility for this scholarship would not only degrade the fundamental purpose of this scholarship, but also render the program financially unstable.

As you know, Florida's Bright Futures scholarships were created to assist Florida's most promising students with the increasing cost of higher education through profit generated by the Florida Lottery. Since its creation, this program has helped over 660,000 of Florida's brightest students receive in-state postsecondary education.

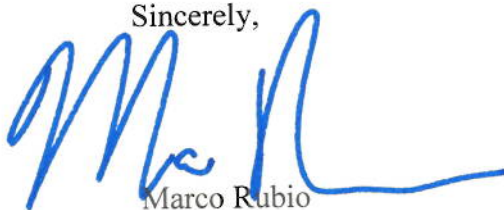
The Bright Futures scholarships are awarded solely on merit, which includes factors such as the students' high school completion, grade point average, test scores, service to their community, and a clean criminal record. The fundamental function of these scholarships is to assist Florida's most promising students based solely on merit.

I am acutely aware of the unfortunate reality that a student's circumstance can make the dream of obtaining a higher education more difficult. As a result, I am supportive of the federally funded Pell Grant program to assist low-income students with need-based grants. This grant program was created with the specific function of promoting access to postsecondary education and, unlike the Bright Futures program, takes a student's financial circumstances into consideration when awarding grants.

Forcing bureaucratic changes to the Bright Futures program would jeopardize the financial solvency of the program. To the credit of the students of Florida, the standards and achievement levels have risen across the entire state, and the number of students eligible for the program has also increased. While I am proud of the strides Florida's students have made, the logical conclusion is that the standards of the program must rise with the achievements of our students.

For these reasons, I formally request you end your investigation of the Bright Futures program. This program has helped thousands of Florida's top students pay for the increasing cost of higher education and go on to be leaders in a large range of industries throughout Florida and the nation. To impose arbitrary rules and exceptions to the standards degrades the fundamental purpose of the scholarship. Unnecessary intervention by the Department of Education threatens the long-term sustainability of this program and will be damaging to the future of many of Florida's most promising students. I thank you for your consideration and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marco Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator