



June 20, 2012

Michelle Rhee
Chief Executive Officer
Students First
825 K Street, 2nd Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Rhee:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of over 210 national organizations charged with the promotion and protection of the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our disappointment that you agreed to speak tomorrow at the annual meeting of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU).

We believe that your participation sends a signal of support to this industry at a critical moment. While you are known as an ardent proponent of accountability, the for-profit sector has relentlessly opposed being held accountable to students and taxpayers. As you are no doubt aware, the Obama Administration proposed modest measures to regulate the industry and to hold the worst actors accountable. A broad coalition representing students, educators, civil rights organizations, and education reformers has supported the Administration and advocated for even tougher accountability measures. The industry, however, has responded by hiring dozens of lobbyists, funneling campaign contributions to members of Congress, and bringing lawsuits to fight against the interests of students and taxpayers every step of the way.

While we have noted your promise to “speak truth to power” before the APSCU assembly, we remain unconvinced that the industry as a whole is motivated by much more than turning a quick profit on the backs of disadvantaged students. To date, there has been no evidence that this industry is capable of policing itself nor that it would agree to even the most modest accountability measures designed to reign in the worst actors. As our colleague David Halperin noted recently in the Huffington Post:

The truth is, while there are indeed some quality programs in the sector, there are many, many rotten apples, because the lack of strong accountability standards has created a race to the bottom -- the more you abuse students, the more money you make.

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We recognize the critical service some of these companies can and do offer to students. We do not want viable programs to fail. But, even more importantly, we need to ensure that affordable, high quality options leading to meaningful employment are widely available.

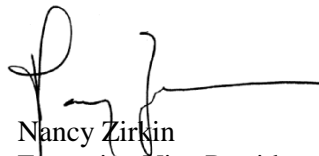
Throughout our efforts to raise standards in this industry, we have encountered students who were victims of well-trained for-profit recruiters who perfected the art of preying on their hopes and dreams and recruiters who inflated the job placement rates and gave students false information about transfer credits. These students are counting on us to stand with them, not with those who have squashed their dreams.

We invite you to work with us, following your appearance at APSCU, to develop a common strategy to improve the quality and affordability of postsecondary and career education. Please do not hesitate to contact Dianne Piche, Senior Counsel, at Piche@civilrights.org, or 202-466-3311, if you are interested in pursuing this further.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President