

**STUDENT  
DEBT  
NATION**



# WE WANT HIGHER ED, NOT DEBT.



**More than 43 million  
Americans have student debt.**



**Total student debt is now \$1.3  
trillion—more than auto debt  
and credit card debt.**



**The average student with a bachelor's degree graduates with almost \$30,000 in debt.**



**Tuition costs have surged by over 500% since 1985.**



**The presence of for-profit colleges has grown with the student debt crisis—for-profit schools now enroll about 10% of all students but are responsible for almost half of all student loan defaults nationwide.**

# STATE SOLUTIONS

The need to stem the student obligation to take meaningful the root causes of the student es municipalities and counties, can adopt to take meaningful action to address

## REFINANCING

Unlike other types of consumer debt, student debt is unique in that borrowers generally cannot refinance their student loans. States have the ability to allow student loan borrowers to refinance their loans through the use of a state or municipal authority. Refinancing student loans at the state level holds huge potential to assist borrowers, especially those with high-interest private loans.

## ENROLLMENT

Federal student loan borrowers are entitled to several programs that could allow them to lower their monthly payments or have their loans forgiven after a set period of payments. State and municipal employees are eligible for a generous program called Public Service Loan Forgiveness that allows them to have their loans forgiven after ten years. Local and state governments can provide an invaluable service to their employees by helping them enroll in a loan forgiveness program.

## FOR-

Because delinquencies profit colleges, the role of for- Several for- spend more marketing instruction. this issue by requirements instruction prioritize marketing and

debt crisis is abundantly clear. States have a unique opportunity and pressing action by both assisting borrowers with student loan debt and by addressing debt crisis. Below are examples of policy solutions that states, and in some cases student debt in their communities.

## PROFITS

almost half of come from for-profit institutions. States must address profit colleges on advertising and than they do on States could address setting minimum for spending on to ensure schools teaching over advertising.

## BORROWER PROTECTION

Student loan debt has significantly less consumer protection than any other type of consumer loan debt. States can play a critical role in ensuring that student loan borrowers know their rights and have a robust complaints system administered by a student loan ombudsman within a state to monitor lenders.

## STATE FUNDING

States must act to make college more affordable by reinvesting in public institutions through initiatives like free community college or debt-free college resolutions. States can also provide “in-state,” more affordable tuition, to undocumented students. 17 states have laws permitting some undocumented students to pay the same tuition as their classmates at public institutions.

# Payton B. Mobile

“

I was so excited to enroll at ITT Tech because I never thought I'd be able to go to college. But because ITT didn't deliver what it promised I don't have a job in my field and I can't afford my loans. During my time at ITT professors were often confused about what they were teaching, and in one case had never used the software they were teaching. I watched YouTube videos in the evening to try to learn some of the skills required for my classes. Support staff turned over constantly, and I never received the job placement services I was promised. I'm currently defaulted on my loans and not using my degree; I'm working as a sales associate. My wife attended Everest, a Corinthian school, for criminal justice. She wanted to be a forensic anthropologist, and Everest told her that their degree would help her get a job in the police force. She was disappointed in the quality of the program and after a police officer told her that the degree would not help her get a job on the force she dropped out. She has \$9,000 to repay.

”

**ALABAMA**

**FOR-PROFITS**

“

My husband and I recently got married and we are looking to buy a home, but our combined student debt is around \$60,000. The idea of starting a family now and beginning our life together with debt like this is a huge hurdle to overcome, especially while perusing my ideal career in the non-profit sector.

”

**ENROLLMENT**



Kylee S.  
Anchorage

**ALASKA**

# Ralph S. Gilbert

“

I went to ITT Tech and planned for two years of college, which should have cost \$27,500. Then one day I was called out of class and an administrator asked me if I could come up with an additional payment. I did not know then that they were charging me extra. When I graduated, I owed \$48,700. I had two student loans: one was private, the other was a federal government loan. The private loan had an interest rate of 14.75 percent. I'm fighting with lawyers to get the student loan discharged. I am working with the federal loan servicer and paying a fair \$150 a month, but I feel that the system cheated me. If I want to go back to college my credits won't transfer since I went to ITT and I will have to start over. I want my student loans forgiven so I can get a better education. I am considered middle class. Why does half of my paycheck have to go to student loans while I am trying to live in a house and buy a car?

”

## ARIZONA

# FOR-PROFITS

“

When I accepted student loans, I thought I'd earn my bachelor's in biology and move on to either a good lab position or pursue my master's and eventually Ph.D. Then the economy took a terrible turn and my husband was laid off. My part-time income and his unemployment income were not enough. I had to drop classes to get a full-time position to support us. It took my husband six months to find a job in his field, and that put us far behind on a lot of bills. Then my student loans came due. I applied for forbearance and deferment as many times as I could. I'm now a full-time secretary and am participating in a loan rehabilitation program, so that I might someday not have to forfeit my income tax refund and face wage garnishment. I hope to get everything in good standing soon, because I have two teenage boys who will be going to college in the next two years. I'm desperately hoping they'll receive scholarships and grants.

”



Jamie G,  
Mountainburg

# BORROWER PROTECTION

# ARKANSAS



Julianna M.,  
Campbell

**CALIFORNIA**

“

I ended my undergraduate career with about \$16,000 in debt, which wasn't bad, but it wasn't good either. This was right before the recession. Finding a long-term job was nearly impossible, but I was able to get by. I decided to go to graduate school to transition into a long-term career. This required taking out even more student loans. I couldn't afford to go on my own and I was only accepted into an out-of-state school. It was either go to school and take out the loans or miss an opportunity to get more education. I finished my graduate degree and ended up with a total of \$84,000 of debt. I came back home and still couldn't find a job in my field. I took a job that barely paid the bills, but still struggled. I eventually was hired in my field, and that gave me a real career. I live in Silicon Valley and get by, but I am by no means comfortable with this debt looming over my head. I'm grateful for what I have been able to pay off, but the interest rates are a huge deterrent to making progress. Along with my own debt, my husband has had to take out student loans to pay for his graduate education. We are drowning! We need help and we need you to do something about this problem.

”

**REFINANCING**

“

I was able to attain an athletic scholarship so I only had minimal debt, but my two sons are in college now and are racking up a considerable amount of debt. It isn't fair that they will be saddled with this debt while attending so-called "state-funded" colleges.

”

**STATE FUNDING**

**Vincent N.  
Littleton**

**COLORADO**



John C.  
Shelton

“

I am a 54-year-old divorced father of three. Several years ago I decided to return to college and become a public school math teacher. I am now in my tenth year of teaching at an urban middle school. I believe I made a good choice, but financially I have questioned that choice. I accumulated nearly \$60,000 in student loan debt, and now am trying to help my three children, who are all in high school or college, prepare for their student debt. I am fearful that our debt will never be paid and our family will forever struggle, even after we all have degrees. Two of my three children have permanent disabilities which has had a very negative financial impact on our struggling family group. I want to enjoy teaching children who are less fortunate than others but will continue to wonder if I have made the right decisions.

”

**CONNECTICUT**

**STATE FUNDING**

“

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Delaware studying computer and electrical engineering. I also completed undergrad at the University. Despite my family's middle-class status, I needed to take out student loans. Rather than looking for schools that could provide the best opportunities, I searched for the best bargain. I received some federal grants to attend, but my four years of undergrad still totaled about \$50,000 in federal loans. Both my parents and me took out these loans, with the understanding that I would be solely responsible for the payments. The federal loans in my name are deferred until I complete my Ph.D., however I have been paying the loans in my parents' name on my graduate student stipend. While I am grateful for the support I have received, I still wonder as the costs of higher education rise, how many are forced to compromise dreams and opportunities because of cost.

”



Joshua S.  
Bear

# STATE FUNDING

# DELAWARE

# Stefanie N. Tallahassee

“

After high school my parents were unable to help me out financially. I completed my bachelor's in education in 1996 and ultimately was making \$11 an hour with my degree. I quickly realized that the waitress next door was making a lot more than I was. I decided to go back to school and get my master's. When I signed up for student loans, I didn't realize the situation that awaited me. Today, 16 years after graduation, I owe over \$72,000. I am proud that I have never missed a payment. That said I have had to take money out of my 401(k) to make payments and have been penalized for it. This debt has cast a shadow on my marriage. I have three children. I've been a social worker in mental health and psychiatric settings for 15 years. I've dedicated my life to helping people.

”

**FLORIDA**

**ENROLLMENT**

“

I chose to be an educator to help others acquire the knowledge to achieve their dreams. Being the seventh of ten children, I had limited access to funds to achieve my goal of becoming an educator. I had to get student loans. I have taught for 35 years in inner-city classrooms throughout America. I am still \$90,000 in debt, much of which is interest. This is in part due to the low wages teachers make, which did not allow me sufficient funds to have a middle-class lifestyle and pay back all my loans. I have paid back some. I also helped my daughter pay back all of hers as we were both in school. I am now 73 years old and retired with a Social Security income. How am I supposed to pay back this loan? I need the one student loan left to be “forgiven for time served,” having given 35 years of my life preparing others in urban classrooms in America.

”

**ENROLLMENT**

**Malikah S.  
Atlanta**

**GEORGIA**

# Caryn C. Hilo

“

At age 53, my husband and I got divorced, leaving me to take care of five kids. I couldn't make enough money with my bachelor's degree so I thought the right thing to do was to go get my master's. The school orientation made it sound like it would be worth it, telling me I was investing in myself. But no one ever explains to you anything about student loan interest capitalization. I was hired at a nonprofit serving families involved in the child welfare system. I love my job and feel I make a difference, but I don't make enough to pay my loans and support my five kids, including my permanently disabled daughter. I am barely surviving with a ballooning debt load strapped to my back. I am trying to give others hope; yet I am losing hope for myself. There has to be a way to allow me to continue serving my community without falling apart due to my financial stress! My loans have ballooned to \$86,000 from an original \$58,000.

”

## HAWAII

# ENROLLMENT

“

My approximate monthly income is \$2,000 and the payments for just the interest on my student loans is \$771 per month. My full monthly payment comes to about \$1,700 per month, and my total student loan debt is around \$113,000. I am 78 years old.

”

**REFINANCING**

**Mary Anne H.  
Boise**

**IDAHO**

# Josue S. Elgin

“

I was excited to be the first member of the family to go to college. Computer Systems Institute made so many promises they never kept. When I asked for help, my teacher did my work for me and gave me an A. I was cheated out of a fair education. Before one professor got fired, she told me, “I don’t know why you are here. You have so much potential, these people here aren’t right.” I didn’t understand, but now I do. During my time at CIS I was hospitalized and went on a medical leave. When returned my program was no longer available. I had to switch from a business program to CNA. I learned that most people graduating from the program only make \$14,000 a year—the equivalent of the cost of going there. I now work for BMO Harris Bank and I make much more than \$14,000 without a college degree. The Computer Systems Institute recruiters were con artists—they didn’t care about education. They just want people to sign papers for a loan and don’t care when they’re stuck with a worthless \$14,000 degree. If I can’t get my money back, I don’t care. I just want to ensure others won’t make the same mistake.

”

ILLINOIS

**FOR-PROFITS**

“

I am just a cosigner for my daughter's student loans. My credit is ruined and I have been served court papers twelve times. I signed my daughter up for the 21st Century Scholar program in junior high and they told me her senior year we didn't qualify. As a good mother does, I told her we would work college out. We're now thousands of dollars in debt, with no future in her specific job market. We are stuck. I demand that my rights to fair bankruptcy protection be restored. This will burst just like the housing bubble and all I wanted for my child was a decent education. Please address this situation.

”

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

**Patsy B.  
Pimento**

**INDIANA**



Sheryl K.  
Waterloo

IOWA

“

I was a nontraditional student and widow with two kids. I went to school to make a better life for us. Upon enrolling for my master's degree, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. I took only the loan amounts to get by. Then, unable to get a decent job, I lost my home and car. I was in forbearance, but eventually found an entry-level job. I still don't make much and have remarried. I will be paying this debt back well into my 70s. I can't risk losing my insurance and not getting my medication. My husband is disabled and when his debt was discharged it counted as income so we had to pay taxes on it. I'm 55 years old. I shouldn't have to struggle this hard. Can you imagine paying income tax on an extra \$25,000 when you barely make that in a year? I do social work for a small company. And in all the years I've paid on this, the principal has not changed.

”

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

When I was 19 I enrolled in a course at International Business College in Las Cruces, NM. I was told when I enrolled that most students also took out a student loan along with the Pell grant. Due to medical problems, I had to withdraw because I couldn't make it on my weekend job alone. IBC assured me there would be no problem. They returned the Pell grant but used the entire student loan to sign me up for their largest course, which cost more. They said I could come back and finish the course at any time. I had relocated to Kansas by this time for financial reasons and was looking for work. I have argued with the Department of Education for years about this. I've been treated terribly. I feel defeated. I developed a rare illness and I went on disability in 2007. I have been unable to discharge my debt and I have defaulted. I am sick and I have no help or recourse. They take \$172.98 out of my disability each month. This makes it difficult to afford food and medical bills.

”

**ENROLLMENT**

**David D.  
Marion**

**KANSAS**

**Billie F.  
Louisville**

“

I got my bachelor's degree in criminal justice from a for-profit program, which guaranteed me a job after graduation. I am still unemployed. It cost me more than \$72,000 to be in a program for three years and four months!

”

**KENTUCKY**

**FOR-PROFITS**

“

In the 1980s and 1990s I borrowed between \$40,000 and \$50,000, and since shortly after that time have been paying various people who have consolidated my loans and then transferred or sold the debt (for example, I used to pay Sallie Mae, now I pay Navient). Although I've already paid roughly what I initially borrowed, fees and interest now put my debt at \$135,000. I am 54, a teacher, and I am paying 10 percent of my income on these loans. I worry I won't be able to retire because this debt keeps growing.

”

**ENROLLMENT**

**Clarence P.  
New Orleans**

**LOUISIANA**

**Cheryl R.  
Orono**

“

As a middle-class student and then parent, loans were how I could afford college. I had children and went back to school at age 28. I was a teacher for several years and then a university professor in education. My salary never kept up with the cost of repayment. I went through bankruptcy after a divorce, and between that and the other costs associated with raising my children my student loans have always been the giant elephant in the room. Due to budget cuts at the university where I was working for 12 years, my position was lost. I am now seeking work again. My student loans have interest rates as high as 7.5 percent and cannot be refinanced. My debt is now at \$146,000. This is not about not wanting to repay, this is about repaying all of my adult life and never getting ahead.

”

**MAINE**

**REFINANCING**

“

I went back to school to be a public librarian and now have over \$100,000 in student debt. I am 60 years old and working as a public servant, making less than \$45,000 a year, but doing four jobs due to a lack of staffing in our library system. I am a librarian, a daycare center worker, a janitor, and a security person. I work in inner city Baltimore among some of the poorest and neediest people in the country. I never guessed that being a librarian would mean that I am pressured to do all of these jobs. At my age, the interest on my loans keeps piling up because I cannot afford to live and make my payments. I will die at my job because I will never be able to pay my loans back at their high interest rates. If big banks and corporations can be given a new lease on life by a buyout, why can't I get a buyout and wipe my debt clean so I can contribute to this economy and not be a burden on it? I am drowning in debt because I wanted to be a public servant and get an education to better myself and am trying to better the lives of the individuals I come in contact with on a daily basis. Help us because we tried to help ourselves to be better contributing citizens to our communities and society as a whole.

”

**ENROLLMENT**

**Donna B.  
Baltimore**

**MARYLAND**

# Judith I. Wellfleet

“

I am almost 70. I had spinal neurosurgery four years ago, which failed and has left me with neuropathic pain in my right and, recently, my left hand and arm. My total income is from Social Security, \$460 a month. Of that, \$290 goes to my condo fee. I went back to school to get my degree at Lesley University at age 54. After graduating, I raised my grandchild for six years. Because of this my student loan, currently at \$11,000, was in forbearance until 35 days ago. Sallie Mae, without trying to contact me, called the partner of my dearest friend of 47 years who died of Alzheimer's this spring, and began to harass her with requests for information on me. I contacted them immediately and requested they take my deceased friend, who was a reference on my initial loan, off their call list. How is this legal? How can Sallie Mae refuse refinancing when folks are struggling to survive? How is it that they employ tactics of horrific means to shame and collect the impossible from people? How can this be the American way?

”

MASSACHUSETTS

# BORROWER PROTECTION

“

I'm 27 years old and a public librarian. I have my undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt and a master's in information science from the University of Michigan. I have over \$100,000 in student debt. I work in public service, so I forfeit any chance at a high salary in exchange for helping others and pursuing work for which I am passionate. I live paycheck to paycheck. I can't buy a house, I live in fear that something will go wrong with my car, and I still have to ask my parents for money on a semi-regular basis. Better options for paying off my loans, like Pay As You Earn (PAYE), would help me manage my debt while still being able to contribute to a savings account. However, I am currently ineligible. Please find a plan that will help not only future college students, but also those already struggling.

”

# ENROLLMENT



Mallorie C.  
Ferndale

# MICHIGAN

**Pamela F.  
St. Paul**

“

I had undergraduate student loan debt so I became an AmeriCorps volunteer and wiped out my debt. I went to Bethel Seminary, which required a move to Minnesota. Less than three months after moving, doctors found a tumor in head. I was not able to move back to Texas, so I took out the maximum amount of student loans so I could continue to have a roof and food while I was recovering. Now, at age 51, my student loan debt is astronomical, at around \$100,000. I wasn't reckless about getting student loans. I don't mind having to pay the loan back because it was a lifesaver for me. What I do mind the interest compounding and the high interest rate.

”

**MINNESOTA**

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

I received my bachelor's degree from Kaplan University online. I had to take out two personal loans, plus student loans to complete my degree. I don't have a job yet. I'm now required to start paying my personal loan and I just can't afford to pay it back.

”

**Dorothy B.  
Batesville**

**FOR-PROFITS**

**MISSISSIPPI**

**Carrie F.  
St. Louis**

“

I have loans for all three of my sons. When I looked into refinancing, the only choice presented was consolidation. Why can't we get a better interest rate than 7.9 percent? We need help. Lower these interest rates so we can make some headway. I have been paying loans for 10 years and have 20 to go. This is crazy. I never should have done this, but then my kids wouldn't be able to go to college.

”

**MISSOURI**

**REFINANCING**

“

Together my husband and I have \$165,234 in student debt from state universities. I am 31; he is 32. After the birth of our first child, we had to use student loans to supplement our income while we tried to finish school. We lived with my husband's parents for a time, but even with both of us working full-time, we couldn't make it on our own because of our payments. Our oldest child is now 10, and my husband is about to graduate with over \$75,000 in student loan debt. I hope to finish my degree by going part-time. We rely on income-based repayment to keep our student loan payments reasonable each month. However, we know once I graduate and find a full-time teaching position our monthly payments will only increase. Because we've had many months in the past where we had to choose between paying our loans and feeding our children, we've gone into default on our loans a few times. Having student loan debt collectors call and tell you that you should find some other way to feed your already-hungry children so that you can pay them instead is an experience I don't think anyone should ever go through.

”



Karen R.  
Bozeman

# STATE FUNDING

# MONTANA

**Christine B.  
Lincoln**

“

I have worked in the service field in education at Title I schools and for nonprofit organizations since my college graduation in 1994. None of that time counts towards Public Service Loan Forgiveness, as my loans were FFEL loans held at NelNet until I consolidated into the Direct Loan program. Now, finally, the timer is running on my 120 payments. It feels unfair that I had to pay all those years, but more recent graduates will not. It would be amazing if the public service option was retroactive for those of us who had older loans!

”

**NEBRASKA**

**ENROLLMENT**

“

I am a disillusioned graduate of Everest College in Ontario, Canada. I now live in Las Vegas. While my husband was deployed in Iraq, I went to college. My first day of school at Everest was in 2009. The private student loan I had with Genesis Financial Services was for \$5,000 and had a rate of 12.9 percent with minimum payments of \$25 monthly while attending classes and \$99 a month immediately upon graduation in 2010. I have now paid the private student loan off in full. However, I still have \$9,500 in federal student loans that were originally with Sallie Mae and now are with Navient. I began paying on time every month when my federal student loans came due. I started working in mental health and decided to continue my education for upward mobility within the federally mandated requirements set by Medicaid. My student loans from Everest were deferred as I continued to attend school for an associate's degree at Ashford University. Immediately following graduation I began to pay on the three student loans that had been deferred, which were now much larger because the interest had accrued. To date my total student loan debt is \$34,895.

”

Mary P.  
Las Vegas

**FOR-PROFITS**

**NEVADA**

**Will H.  
Milford**

“

I have negative equity on my student loans after 12 years of monthly payments on schedule. While paying my loans I had to have a medical procedure but did not have health insurance. Because of this I took a deferment on my student loans. I have two part-time jobs in addition to my full-time job to help pay off my medical expenses. I can no longer get a deferment on my student debt. In just four years the loan has compounded to \$25,000, much more than the original debt.

”

**NEW  
HAMPSHIRE**

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

I am 26 and living with insurmountable student debt. I went to Fairleigh Dickinson in Madison and graduated with a bachelor's in political science. I currently work in politics; however, the salary is miniscule. As a first-generation college student, I wanted loans that provided protection. After borrowing the maximum in federal loans, I looked for loans that were similar and was told about HESAA NJCLASS. They were advertised under a state agency and seemed similar to federal loans. I did not want private loans because of the lack of benefits and protections. Unfortunately, after graduating, I learned quickly that NJCLASS loans were not similar at all to federal loans. In some ways they are worse than for-profit private lenders. I wanted to attend college to not only educate myself, but to also have a more secure financial future. I wanted to be able to not struggle on a daily basis. The majority of my income goes directly to HESAA for interest alone. I am not even paying down the principal. My balance keeps increasing. The economic ramifications of not developing resolutions to help borrowers could have long-lasting effects on this country. I hope our leaders see the urgency of this matter and fight to prevent the next bubble to burst.

”

# FOR-PROFITS



Cassandra A.  
Clifton

## NEW JERSEY

## Zachary N. Milford

## NEW MEXICO

“

I worked hard to distinguish myself as an undergraduate so I could qualify for a scholarship as a graduate student. I got double honors in double majors (research psychology and English literature). I went on to graduate school overseas, but unfortunately I had no access to financial aid there. As a matter of survival—paying for rent, food, tuition, and books—I took out student loans. I only took subsidized loans and never took more than I needed. I'm now \$50,000 in debt—all from grad school. I have a Ph.D. and am working as hard as I can at a university teaching as a postdoctoral fellow. The pay is less than \$2,000 a month, leaving me no money to pay down my loans. I can't afford to have children or get married. I can't afford a proper engagement ring. My life is on hold. Please help me help myself with repayment.

”

## ENROLLMENT

“

My student debt is enormous. It prevents us from buying a larger home or having a second child. I'm a taxpayer and a hardworking teacher, so I am eligible for the public service loan forgiveness. But the interest rate on my loans is 8.25 percent. Please help us by allowing refinancing at the very least. I am an upstanding citizen who contributes to the economy. There are millions like me who are crippled by this debt. Help us. Help this country.

”

**REFINANCING**

**Jill S.  
Cold Spring**

**NEW  
YORK**

**Joyce B.  
Winton**

“

I owe over \$65,000 in student loans. I am 50 years old and needed a degree to better my chances of not just having a job, but a career. I have 13 more classes left before I earn my bachelor's degree, but at this cost? When I complete my studies I will owe student loans of \$75,000 or more. It feels like I won't have paid them back even by the time my grandchildren's children are grown. I am not trying to be funny. I am just giving you a bird's-eye view of the financial stress I will be in for the next 30 years of my life, if I live that long. Please give us an alternative to this. A high price has been put on education and it is a price that many of us are incapable of paying back. I need to know that as an American I can rely on this great country and our leaders to help with this crisis. I cannot possibly pay all this money back; the cost is just too great.

”

**NORTH  
CAROLINA**

**STATE FUNDING**

“

Throughout my college career at United Tribes Technical College I have taken out student loans for two semesters. I didn't finish my degree initially and couldn't pay my student loans. Because of the interest rate the loans continue to grow. Currently I am back in school and my student loans have increased to around \$10,000. It is very discouraging as a current student and mother to worry about financial burdens that hinder my educational experience. But as I further my education, I am aware of the responsibilities and knowledge I take with me from this experience. I know I must accomplish all of my collegiate goals, regardless of the cost.

”

**REFINANCING**

**Margaret L.  
Bismarck**

**NORTH  
DAKOTA**

# Chris G. Hudson

“

ITT Tech filtered students through without caring about their grades. The students who took it seriously are left with huge amounts of student loan debts. They made me take out a private student loan to be able to finish my degree, along with a large amount of federal loans. They promised to assist me in finding a job after I graduated but never did, even though I called and asked multiple times. I don't work in my field of study because the jobs available to me with this degree don't pay enough to live on. I would never recommend that school to anybody, and I suffer every day from attending that institution. I can't afford to pay back my loans. My monthly payment is 50 percent of my salary. How am I supposed to pay and live my life? These schools should be held accountable for scamming students. Charging for a service and not delivering that service is stealing, isn't it?

”

OHIO

**FOR-PROFITS**

“

Student loan assistance must take into account borrowers, not just future students. What about those with loans who, like myself, have managed to stay out of default only by taking years of forbearance or deferment, which has subsequently caused our loans to explode exponentially because of high interest? I feel as if I am in a situation where my loans will always be out of reach for payment possibilities. In other words, I could possibly make payments now on the amount I borrowed, which was \$68,800, but now my loan is now much larger and growing each year.

”

**Deanna S.  
Bartlesville**

**REFINANCING**

**OKLAHOMA**

**Jean M.  
Salem**

“

I graduated in 1986 and owed \$23,000. I am now 68 and I owe \$64,000 despite years of payments. I see no way to pay this debt off. I worked for a time at a government mental health agency and also worked at a county in Oregon as a mental health investigator. I am now retired and the debt just keeps growing. I am facing the realization that I will not be able to pay this debt off in my lifetime.

”

**OREGON**

**ENROLLMENT**

“

After graduation I did not have a full-time job. I used a hardship forbearance and ultimately consolidated my loans. My original principal was \$47,000 but with interest it grew to \$77,000. At the time I was unable to pay more than half of the payment amount my lender demanded. When I started working with a school district they began garnishing my paycheck. I did not know that at that time I was dealing with a collection agency and that most of that the money was going to collection fees, not the principal. In 2014 at age 62 I had to retire from my job because of health problems. Now I am on Social Security and a pension. I have to pay for my health insurance, which takes a large part of my income. My student loan is serviced by Navient and now and I am on an income-driven repayment program. I still pay close to \$100 dollars a month. I have to re-submit documents to prove my income every January. It has been and continues to be a nightmare and there is no end to this.

”



Felicity C.  
Philadelphia

# BORROWER PROTECTION

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Courtney C.  
West Warwick**

“

I'm 33 and attended the New England Institute of Technology. I began this journey working part-time and trying to pay tuition. I ended up having to take out student loans and was crippled by the payments. I returned to school after earning an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree to earn a master's degree. I started with \$100,000 in loans and am down to less than \$40,000. I finally consolidated all of my loans into one payment and am seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. There has to be a better way.

”

**RHODE  
ISLAND**

**REFINANCING**

“

I owe far more than my mother ever did and hold less wealth, even though I earn more. I'm a 43-year-old from Blythewood and have \$40,000 in student loans after studying at Winthrop University in Rock Hill. I've racked up another \$20,000 in education debt for my son, a 22-year-old college senior. It's really been awful. I gave up my studies in 2008 to work at Verizon Wireless as a global technical support coordinator. I live with a roommate to save on rent and drive a 1999 Chevrolet Cavalier that I bought for \$900, because I can't afford a car payment. My income is being garnished to pay my student loans, which takes 15 percent of my income. That's substantial.

”

## ENROLLMENT



Erica A.  
Blythewood

# SOUTH CAROLINA



Allison R.  
Sisseton

**SOUTH  
DAKOTA**

“

I am a First American, a member of a tribal nation, and a single mother. I first went to college at United Tribes Technical College. While there, in 2010, I took out a student loan to help pay rent and utilities. I have been struggling for years to pay that loan back. I have had my tax returns withheld, and eventually lost my Pell award due to my default on the loan. I have finally returned to school. As a First American I am fortunate to have education grants and social services available. Without this assistance I would be unable to make it. Like many single mothers I rely on this assistance to achieve my degree. Soon I'll have my associate's degree in criminal justice. Soon my loan default will be paid off and I will qualify for Pell again. My student debt won't be holding me back. I know the importance of money management and I will take this with me as I continue my education.

”

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

I graduated with a degree in criminal justice from the University of Phoenix. I wanted to get a career in which I could help people. I will never be able to afford to work in law enforcement. My student loan debt is roughly \$68,000. My loan payments will eventually be over \$700 per month. I am in my mid-40's and I will be eligible for retirement and Social Security before my loans have been paid off. I will never be able to own a house, nor do I ever see a day in which I will be free from debt. I only wanted to help others who could not help themselves. But I am stuck working in the computer industry because it pays more than law enforcement. So the long and short of it, I have a degree in a field I enjoy. I will never be able to use that degree because of my loans. I will most likely pass away from old age before the debt is paid off. And the worse part? My degree is barely worth the paper it is written on. A large number of employers don't recognize the degree. So I have a piece of paper that cost me over \$68,000.

”

**Anthony M.  
Louisville**

**FOR-PROFITS**

**TENNESSEE**



Brian S.  
San Antonio

“

I was the first in my family to attain a graduate degree. I did so only by borrowing heavily. The average pay in my profession is approximately \$40,000. Twice I have had to place my student loans in forbearance due to my inability to pay. My monthly payment amount exceeds my monthly rent on my apartment—it is over \$800 per month. There simply is no way to afford this, and I know that my story is by no means unique. We must do something about this now. College costs keep increasing every year—even at public universities and colleges, and the student loan companies are the ones profiting off college students like myself, who mistakenly believed that a higher education was the key to success.

”

TEXAS

STATE FUNDING

“

I had student debt, but not nearly as much as my peers. This is only because I had the time and awareness to apply for private scholarships. I wouldn't have been able to go to my school of choice without them. I was lucky in that the loans I had didn't accrue interest until six months after I graduated. It gave me time during school to work and save and still meet tuition deadlines. I realize I was much more fortunate than others though. I was able to save up enough but only through working two jobs in the summers and working full-time during my senior year while I was simultaneously writing a thesis and taking classes. This should not be the norm. What about those who don't have the resources I did?

”

**Morgan D.  
Salt Lake City**

**STATE FUNDING**

**UTAH**

**Caitlin S.  
Manchester**

“

I have \$112,000 in student loans from undergraduate and graduate schools. I am a public librarian and I make about \$31,000 in take-home pay. It is unlikely I will make significantly more than this in the future. My federal loans qualify for public service loan forgiveness, but those loans will all be paid back by the time the 10 years is up. My private loans will not. It is ridiculous to give young people a mortgage's worth of student loans when they have no idea what their future income will be. I value my education but I would have done things very differently looking back. Now I am just stuck with these loans with no way out.

”

**VERMONT**

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

Towards the end of my service in the United States Army, I became a mother and started working for the federal government. My husband passed away in 1991 while still on active duty, leaving me to raise our two small children on my own. My first priority is providing a good life for my children. I initially called the University of Phoenix just to get more information. For the next four months I was aggressively harassed by a recruiter. When I finally decided to sign up things took a turn for the worst. Classes were inflexible and they lacked proper resources. I did not have proper access to instructors. On one occasion I was suddenly dropped from a course even though I had turned in all of my assignments. After such a poor experience I left in 2011. To this day, I have debt. I found out that my credits cannot be transferred to other colleges. The school is withholding my transcript because I have an outstanding balance on my student loans. Veterans have always been there for you when you need them. Now you need to be there for veterans, and stop for-profit colleges from manipulating and misleading us into poor educational programs.

”



Sharon W.  
Petersburg

# FOR-PROFITS

# VIRGINIA



Jaclyn C.  
Renton

**WASHINGTON**

“

I have close to \$150,000 in student loan debt from finishing my master's in public health this past February. This debt is compounded by the high interest rates at which I had to borrow. I graduated with my bachelor's in August, 2008 so I have student loans that have been collecting interest for seven years with five to 10 percent interest rates. I estimate my student loan payments will be around \$1,500 a month once my loans come out of deferment. Students are borrowing money just to go to college, and banks are making a huge profit off of us. How is this fair? Students should be able to borrow money for college at lower rates. Students come out of college thousands of dollars in debt. How is this benefiting our society?

”

**REFINANCING**

“

I am a 27-year-old social worker who went to the University of Alabama. I came to DC to complete part of my master's program and once I got here, I fell in love with the city and its people. I work in a school in Congress Heights and even on days that aren't easy, I am so glad I got to meet and support the kids I work with. I am still paying off my master's degree and my undergrad loans. Every month, one-third of my paycheck goes towards my student debt. Living in this city is not cheap and some days I think about moving back home to Alabama. But even then, I could not afford to buy a house. I could not fully pay off my car. I am working with some of the most at-risk kids in the country and I would never want to give it up, but my student loans make it hard to see what my future in DC will look like.

”

**Molly R.**  
**Washington, D.C.**

**ENROLLMENT**

**WASHINGTON**  
**D.C.**

**Megan V.  
Bethany**

“

While in school at Bethany College, I was hospitalized and had to drop out. I took out more loans to finish what I started, but I got behind on my payments because of my medical bills. When I graduated, the economy was bad so I struggled to get a good-paying job. I can't buy a house. I can't start a family. I can't go to graduate school. I can barely get by because I'm trying to improve my credit by keeping my loans in good standing. I've been doing this for six years now. Help us.

”

**WEST  
VIRGINIA**

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

“

I'm an English professor who's still paying off student loan debt 14 years after graduating. I have had to take leave of my job for two years in order to care for my mother who had a stroke and suffers from dementia. Since I'm making no money right now, the lion's share of my savings is paying off my student loans. This month, I ran out of money and can't make my payment. I am being charged a \$35 overdraft fee because I didn't have enough in my account at the time of the automatic debit for my student loan. It's embarrassing to this country that my student loans are dragging me, a professor, into abject poverty. Once I start working again, I figure I'll be paying off the remainder of my student loan debt for the rest of my life.

”

**Sarah P.  
Stevens Point**

**BORROWER PROTECTION**

**WISCONSIN**



Aaron S.  
Yellowstone  
National Park

**WYOMING**

“

Currently I pay approximately \$315 a month on my student loans at a 7.25 percent fixed rate. With interest, I estimate I will pay about \$90,000 or more by the time I pay this off. If I were allowed to refinance my consolidated debt I may be able to lower my payments and interest rate, allowing me to assist in the economic recovery, or possibly save some of it for retirement. Wouldn't that be a better use of my dollars than paying so much more on these loans than what I started with?

”

**REFINANCING**

**Thank you to all those who shared their  
stories with us.**

**Stories have been edited for length and clarity,  
but otherwise we have worked to preserve the  
voices of these student loan borrowers.**

**a project of:**

**GENERATION  
PROGRESS**

