



NEWS RELEASE

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Landmark federal settlement will lead to student debt relief for North Dakota's public educators and employees

BISMARCK, N.D. — After years of legal battles to ensure the effective administration of the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, teachers, nurses, firefighters and other public servants will be getting substantial relief from crippling student debt.

On Oct. 12, 2021, the American Federation of Teachers announced that they had reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Education in the case of Weingarten v. DeVos, filed in July 2019 to hold the federal government accountable for its failure to manage the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. In North Dakota, many of the educators and public employees affected by this settlement are members of North Dakota United, which is affiliated nationally with both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

“All of us at North Dakota United wish to extend our gratitude to Dr. Miguel Cardona and his team at the U.S. Department of Education for redirecting USDE policy so that the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program finally works in the way that Congress intended,” ND United President Nick Archuleta said. “In North Dakota, on average, a graduate of one of our fine colleges of education can expect to graduate with \$28,000 of education-related debt. Other public employees face similar financial stress as they take employment with governmental agencies. In most cases, these dedicated public servants provide the vital public services that all North Dakotans depend on for a wage that is 8 to 12 percent less than those with the same level of education and experience who work in the private sector. The PSLF is not a *handout*, it’s a *way out* of crushing debt that delays public employee participation in our economy, and slows North Dakota’s economic engine.”

(more)

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PSLF guarantees that those who work in public service and consistently pay their monthly student loan bills will have the balance of their loans forgiven after 10 years. But since the program's inception in 2007, fewer than 2 percent of applicants have received the relief they were promised. Borrowers from across the country have been issued confusing and sometimes contradictory guidance about the status of their applications for many years, and the U.S. Department of Education has given no clear process for contesting these erroneous decisions.

The settlement in this landmark case will now allow for an official review for those who were denied the forgiveness they believed they were owed. ND United will be offering resources on our website at www.ndunited.org for our members to help them navigate the process of applying or re-applying for assistance.

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North Dakota United is the largest professional union of educators and public employees in the state, representing 11,500 members in total, and we are loudest, strongest and most effective champion of providing great public education and public services for all our students and communities.

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