

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2025

René L. Rocque
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Inspector General
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Acting Inspector General Rocque:

Earlier this year, we opened an investigation into the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) infiltration of the Department of Education (ED or the Department).¹ Our investigation revealed some new information about the scope of DOGE's access to the Department's internal databases. For example, ED informed us that "one employee had read-only access to two of [Federal Student Aid] FSA's internal systems:" Financial Management System (FMS) and Partner Connect.² However, ED refused to provide us other key information, including which DOGE employees had access to sensitive Education Department data, whether access to borrowers' data, in particular, was granted, and what safeguards had been implemented to protect this sensitive ED data.³

We write to refer these findings to your office and, given the Department's failure to provide full information in response to our inquiries, request that the U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General (ED OIG) conduct a review to determine whether DOGE and ED may have compromised sensitive data or violated the agency's procedures and responsibilities to protect sensitive data from misuse and unauthorized access.⁴ Furthermore, given new reporting that DOGE plans to consolidate Americans' personal information across government databases,⁵ we

¹ Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren, et al. to Acting Secretary Denise Carter of the Department of Education, February 7, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_to_ed_re_doge_privacy_concerns.pdf; Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren, et al. to Acting Secretary Denise Carter of the Department of Education, February 26, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/warren_letter_to_doge_re_privacy_concerns.pdf.

² Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf.

³ *Id.*; Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, April 8, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed_on_federal_student_loan_data_48.25.pdf.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, "Student Privacy at the U.S. Department of Education," <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/#:~:text=Student%20Privacy%20at%20the%20U.S.,FERPA%20and%20PPRA%20Regulations>; U.S. Department of Education, "Data Security: K-12 and Higher Education," <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/data-security-k-12-and-higher-education#:~:text=The%20Department%20of%20Education%20is,Security%20page%20for%20additional%20requirements>.

⁵ The New York Times, "Trump Wants to Merge Government Data. Here Are 314 Things It Might Know About You.," Emily Badger and Sheera Frenkel, April 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/09/us/politics/trump-musk-data-access.html>.

request that you evaluate the impact this action will have on students' and educators' privacy and provide recommendations for safeguarding this data in light of these new threats.

In Response to Congressional Requests, ED Has Refused to Provide Key Information About DOGE's Takeover

In February 2025, DOGE initiated a “takeover” of the Education Department, “gain[ing] access to federal student loan data, which includes personal information for millions of borrowers.”⁶ Initial reporting raised potential privacy concerns given the federal student loan database stores borrowers' Social Security numbers, income information, and other personally identifiable information.⁷ Indeed, one ED employee worried that DOGE would “use information from the national student loan database to target Americans, push career employees out and hamper the federal government's ability to collect on federal loans.”⁸

Soon afterwards, we opened an investigation into the matter. Throughout the course of this investigation, ED revealed a limited set of new information about the extent of DOGE's access to ED's internal databases, but refused to disclose whether and to what extent DOGE had access to student loan borrowers' data, specifically.

In its February 18, 2025 response, the Department disclosed that DOGE “support[ed] a review of the Department and Federal Student Aid (FSA) contracts to identify possible efficiencies.”⁹ To conduct this review, ED granted “one employee [] read-only access” to two of FSA's internal systems, FMS and Partner Connect, which both hold information on Title IV loan and grant programs. ED also disclosed that it had since “revoked” that employee's access to both systems.¹⁰ However, the Department did not indicate why the DOGE employee's access had been revoked, whether this employee has retained access to any other ED databases, and what actions the Department has done to ensure that sensitive information would not be released or misused. ED refused to answer any of these questions in our February 26, 2025 follow-up letter, citing “ongoing litigation.”¹¹

ED further refused to disclose any information about the scope of DOGE's access to sensitive student borrower data, including whether or not DOGE was granted access to the National Student Loan Data System or any other database that holds sensitive federal student loan borrower data.¹² ED also did not answer any of our questions about how it intends to safeguard

⁶ The Washington Post, “U.S. government officials privately warn Musk's blitz appears illegal,” Jeff Stein, Dan Diamond, Faiz Siddiqui, Cat Zakrzewski, Hannah Natanson and Jacqueline Alemany, February 4, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/02/04/elon-musk-government-legal-doge/>.

⁷ Debt.org, “DODGE Now Has Access to Student Loan Data: How to Stay Protected,” Max Fay, March 12, 2025, <https://www.debt.org/blog/doge-student-loan-data/>.

⁸ NBC News, “Inside DOGE's takeover of the Education Department,” Tyler Kingkade and Natasha Korecki, February 8, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/elon-musk-doge-team-education-department-rcna191244>.

⁹ Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, April 8, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed_on_federal_student_loan_data_48.25.pdf.

personal student loan borrower data or other financial data, given DOGE’s interventions.¹³ The Department refused to provide any identifying information about or an exact number of employees “who have been granted access to Department information technology and data systems,” potentially including student borrower data.¹⁴ And, when pressed about discrepancies in how these employees were reportedly onboarded, ED remained silent.¹⁵ In short, these responses failed to diminish our concerns about borrowers’ privacy and whether the Department may have violated the law or the federal government’s procedures in handling this data.

Request for a Review by the ED OIG

Because of the Department’s refusal to provide full and complete information, the full extent of DOGE’s role and influence at ED remains unknown. This lack of clarity is not only frustrating for borrowers but also dangerous for the future of an agency that handles an extensive student loan portfolio and a range of federal aid programs for higher education.¹⁶

Additionally, DOGE is now reportedly “leading an effort to link government databases” across federal agencies, consolidating all of Americans’ segregated records in one large “data trove.”¹⁷ This consolidation threatens the privacy of millions of students, educators, and student loan borrowers across the country whose information is on file at ED.¹⁸ Furthermore, this initiative “would break a longstanding covenant between the federal government and the U.S. public

¹² Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf; [LINK TO 2nd ED RESPONSE].

¹³ Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf; [LINK TO 2nd ED RESPONSE].

¹⁴ University of California Student Association v. Denise Carter, in her official capacity as Acting Secretary of Education, et al., Supplemental Declaration of Adam Ramada, 1:25-cv-00354-RDM, February 16, 2025, p.3, https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277216/gov.uscourts.dcd.277216.18.2_1.pdf; Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren, et al. to Acting Secretary Denise Carter of the Department of Education, February 26, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/warren_letter_to_doge_re_privacy_concerns.pdf; Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, April 8, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed_on_federal_student_loan_data_48.25.pdf.

¹⁵ Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf; University of California Student Association v. Denise Carter, in her official capacity as Acting Secretary of Education, et al., Supplemental Declaration of Adam Ramada, 1:25-cv-00354-RDM, February 16, 2025, p.3, https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277216/gov.uscourts.dcd.277216.18.2_1.pdf; Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren, et al. to Acting Secretary Denise Carter of the Department of Education, February 26, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/warren_letter_to_doge_re_privacy_concerns.pdf; Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, April 8, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed_on_federal_student_loan_data_48.25.pdf.

¹⁶ Federal Student Aid, “Federal Student Loan Portfolio,” <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/portfolio>; U.S. Department of Education, “Grants for Higher Education,” <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-higher-education>.

¹⁷ The New York Times, “Trump Wants to Merge Government Data. Here Are 314 Things It Might Know About You.,” Emily Badger and Sheera Frenkel, April 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/09/us/politics/trump-musk-data-access.html>.

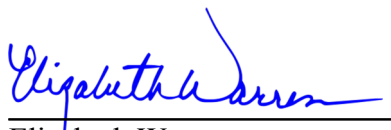
¹⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Federal Student Loans: Preliminary Observations on Borrower Repayment Practices after the Payment Pause,” July 29, 2024, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107150>.

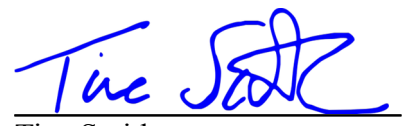
rooted in privacy laws — that Americans who share their personal data with official agencies can trust that it will be secured and used only for narrow purposes.”¹⁹

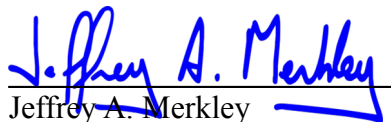
Accordingly, we request that you conduct a review as to whether ED adhered to the *Privacy Act*, 5 U.S.C. § 552a, and “all applicable laws and regulations concerning management of borrower data” and institutional data²⁰ when it allowed DOGE access to its databases. We are concerned that ED undermined its own mission to “protecting student privacy”²¹ in its collaboration and arrangements with DOGE. This review would be consistent with your office’s mission to promote “integrity of the Department’s programs and operations” and “identify[] ... abuse[] and criminal activity involving Department funds, programs, and operations.”²²

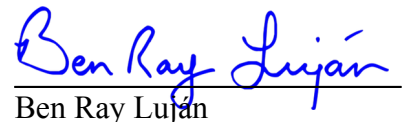
Thank you for your attention to this important matter.


Sincerely,

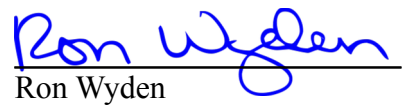

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Tina Smith
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

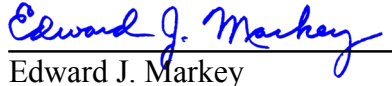

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

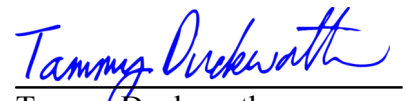
¹⁹ The New York Times, “Trump Wants to Merge Government Data. Here Are 314 Things It Might Know About You.,” Emily Badger and Sheera Frenkel, April 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/09/us/politics/trump-musk-data-access.html>.

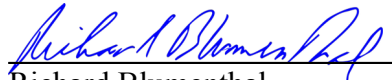
²⁰ Letter from the Department of Education to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 18, 2025, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_ed.pdf

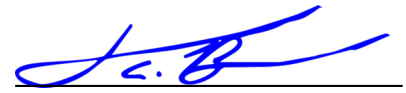
²¹ U.S. Department of Education, “Student Privacy at the U.S. Department of Education,” <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/>.

²² U.S. Department of Education office of Inspector General, “About,” <https://oig.ed.gov/about>.


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Cory A. Booker
United States Senator