

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 12, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

As you work to craft another recovery package to help Americans cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to provide as much funding as possible for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and to ensure these institutions' equitable access to urgent and necessary relief funds. We further request that HBCUs receive at least the same proportion of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund as they received in last year' COVID-19 relief packages.¹

The Nation's 101 accredited HBCUs are vital to the success of low-income, first-generation college students of color and contribute markedly to our Nation's economy.² Since the founding of the Nation's first HBCU in 1837, these institutions have survived racial and systemic discrimination not only within higher education, but also in other venues such as the bond market, labor market, and the socio-political systems of the respective states in which they are located. Due to these factors, HBCUs have historically experienced challenges in gaining access to the resources necessary to consistently provide quality academic programming to their students, maintain adequate infrastructure, and hire and retain leading experts in various fields of study. Despite these challenges, HBCUs have been remarkably successful at educating our Nation's political and economic leaders, including members of both chambers of Congress and the current Vice President of the United States.

In the December COVID-19 relief package, HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) received \$1.7 billion in essential supplemental funding from the \$22.7 billion Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. This funding was critical, as HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs educate a disproportionately high percentage of the Nation's underserved students. For example, Black students, faculty, and staff at HBCUs have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to longstanding health and economic

¹ Including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (Public Law No: 116-136) and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law No: 116-260).

² In 2017, UNCF released a report detailing the economic impact of HBCUs. The report revealed that in 2014, the impact of HBCUs on their regional economies included a total economic impact of \$14.8 billion.

disparities, such as higher rates of unemployment.³ Students, faculty, and staff of color and Indian Country have also experienced acute suffering from higher rates of infection and mortality from COVID-19, which is why it is so important that all TCUs (as defined in Section 316(b)(3) of the Higher Education Act (20 USC 1059c)) receive future relief funding. As such, there is a critical need for additional emergency financial support to help these institutions through this historic economic and public health crisis.

President Biden’s American Rescue Plan proposes at least \$35 billion for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund to ensure colleges have critical resources to implement public health protocols, execute distance learning plans, and provide emergency financial aid grants to students. It is critical that Congress, at minimum, enact President Biden’s proposal and ensure that HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs have equitable access to this fund.

Specifically, we ask that the HBCU community, as well as TCUs and MSIs, receive as much of this fund as possible and no less than the same portion of the funding they received in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021. We also request that the emergency funds not prematurely sunset while underresourced institutions are experiencing the consequences of the pandemic. We further request that Congress maintain a strong maintenance of effort provision to prevent states from cutting back their investments in higher education.

Finally, we ask for continued flexibility for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs to use their Higher Education Act Title III and VII grant dollars in ways which are most helpful to each respective institution as they attempt to adjust to the circumstances brought about by this crisis, and that HBCUs continue to be eligible for any additional funds allocated to the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education for institutions facing significant unmet needs due to COVID-19.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to working with you to support these important programs in this time of crisis.

Sincerely,

/s/ Reverend Raphael Warnock

Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Ossoff

Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

³ U.S. Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary.html>

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator