



August 3, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on HELP
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby and Chairman Alexander:

We, the undersigned organizations, collectively represent a group of institutions of higher education (IHEs) that enroll over 6 million students and are eligible to receive financial assistance under Titles III and V of the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA). More specifically, we advocate on the behalf of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs); Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs); Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs); Alaska Native-Serving Institutions and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNH); Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs); and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).

We would like to begin by expressing our gratitude for the 10 percent set-aside of funding for HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, and the remaining Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) in the *Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protections, and Schools* (HEALS) *Act*. This separate stream of funding for the institutions we represent shows a recognition of the importance of these institutions to the students that they serve and a strong commitment from Senate Republicans to address the financial struggles, and funding inequities, our institutions have and continue to endure due to COVID-19.¹ The proposed 10 percent set-aside in funding will enable the institutions that we represent to respond to the needs of their faculty, staff, and students as it relates to their efforts to reopen this fall; provide quality academic programming safely, in person, or through distance education as circumstances necessitate; train faculty and staff to deliver quality academic instruction virtually; build the

¹ 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>

technological infrastructure needed to facilitate delivery of quality distance education programs; provide the requisite technology and access to broadband to make virtual instruction accessible and reliable for students and faculty alike; and so much more. This separate stream of funding is vital to the sustainability of our institutions and we strongly encourage Congress to maintain at least a 10 percent set aside for our institutions, in relation to the overall funding allocated for higher education in the final COVID-19 response legislation. We also want to express our gratitude for the continued ability of the institutions we represent to have the freedom to use current Title III, V, and VII grants in the *Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965* to respond to the unique circumstances and ever-changing dynamic presented by COVID-19.

As we have previously noted, the higher education sector is at the forefront of industries that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 and remains at great risk as this pandemic persists. Self-evidently, any ill effects suffered by IHEs will have a corresponding negative impact on their students. The American Council on Education estimates that students and institutions will need at least \$120.4 billion to cover the costs of reopening, lost revenue, and emergency financial aid in the coming year. Indeed, because our particular institutions enroll a majority of low-income, first-generation college students, and are under-resourced relative to the IHEs that are ineligible for funding under Titles III and V of the HEA, the negative impact our institutions experience is greater. Students attending our institutions are also impacted at markedly higher rates due to the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has on communities of color.² Given this information, it is extremely important that our institutions and all of the students that attend our institutions receive the financial resources needed to thrive amid this global pandemic. With this being said, we would ask you to consider the additional needs below as you begin to finalize the next COVID-19 relief bill.

1. Include a waiver of the allowable uses in the Minority Science Engineering and Improvement Program.

The Minority Science Engineering and Improvement Program (MSEIP) is a program that allows our institutions to receive grants to do things such as develop faculty programs and curriculum materials to improve the science and engineering education on our campuses and to increase the participation of underrepresented minorities in science and technological careers.³ The CARES Act permitted the Secretary of Education to waive allowable uses for grants awarded under Part A or B of Title III, Chapter I or II of Subpart 2 of Part A of Title IV, Title V, or Subpart 4 of Part A of Title VII of the HEA. While we thank Congress for responding to our request to allow for the flexibility of allowable uses of current grant funds in the aforementioned areas of the HEA, we also request for this flexibility in MSEIP. It is our belief that Congress intended to grant institutions maximum flexibility to respond to the changed circumstances and altered needs of students as a consequence of COVID-19, and we want to ensure that our institutions can utilize any and all available resources.

² The CDC released a report on April 17, 2020 that shared race and ethnicity data from 580 patients hospitalized with lab-confirmed COVID-19. This report found that 45% of individuals for whom race or ethnicity data was available were white, compared to 59% of individuals in the surrounding community. However, the report also indicated that 33% of hospitalized patients were black compared to 18% in the community, among other information. Information regarding this study can be found at https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm?s_cid=mm6915e3_w.

³ The MSEIP program can be found in Title III, Part E of the HEA.

2. Include a technology fund to allow students to access broadband.

Over 6 million students attend our institutions with the vast majority of these students being from low-income households. While the E-rate program exists in the Universal Service Fund, this program is primarily for students in k-12 education and does not include low-income students attending postsecondary education. In the CARES Act, our institutions were given the ability to utilize resources to purchase technological equipment for our students to help them complete their assignments online; participate in virtual counseling; receive mentoring and tutoring services online; and complete other required tasks in relation to their academic program through distance education. While access to equipment is important, so is access to broadband. According to an article released by the Pew Research Center, “roughly three-in-ten adults with household incomes below \$30,000 a year (29%) don’t own a smartphone... and [m]ore than four-in-ten [adults] don’t have home broadband services (44%) or a traditional computer (46%).”⁴ S.3701, the *Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act*, introduced by Senator Amy Klobuchar, takes a responsible approach to meeting the needs of our low-income, first-generation college students and the households they come from while prioritizing HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs.⁵ It is imperative that our students have the ability to access broadband to allow them to continue their academic program and complete their education.

3. Provide \$6.5 billion in research and development funding for HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, PBIs, and other Minority-Serving Institutions.

Academic research is the cornerstone for the advancement of our nation’s economy and stability. Considering the current crisis, it is imperative that we have leading academics at the front lines conducting the needed research to combat future pandemics and solve for other potential health crises. According to the most recent data, all IHEs received a funding total of \$79.436 billion dollars of research and development (R&D) funding in 2018 with \$42.018 billion coming from the federal government.⁶ Of these institutions, our institutions received significantly less funding. For instance, HBCUs received a total of \$534.045 million dollars in overall R&D funding with \$400.349 million coming from the federal government, equating to only 0.67 percent of total funding.⁷ Also, TCUs received \$13.8 million of overall funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), or less than one-fourth of one percent, compared to \$5.558 billion awarded by NSF in research and education funding to the nation’s higher education institutions.⁸ Even institutions that meet the 25 percent Hispanic enrollment requirement but do not necessarily qualify for eligibility of Title V funds received a total of \$5.902 billion dollars in funding with \$2.563 billion coming from the federal

⁴ Anderson, M., & Kumar, M. (2019, May 7). *Digital divide persists even as lower-income Americans make gains in tech adoption*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/>

⁵ Representative Anna Eshoo introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives (H.R.6814).

⁶ National Science Foundation. (2020). *Higher education R&D expenditures, by source of funds, R&D field, and survey population: FY 2018*. Retrieved from <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2018/html/herd18-dt-tab001.html>

⁷ National Science Foundation. (2020). *Higher education R&D expenditures at historically black colleges and universities, ranked by all R&D expenditures, by source of funds: FY 2018*. Retrieved from <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2018/html/herd18-dt-tab031.html>

⁸ National Science Foundation. (2020). *Survey of Federal Science and Engineering Support to Universities, Colleges, and Nonprofit Institutions Fiscal Year 2017*. Retrieved from <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/fedsupport/2017/>

government, equating to 7.2 percent of total funding.⁹ The discrepancies in funding are obviously stark, and it is apparent that there needs to be more investment in research and development dollars for our institutions. In light of the foregoing, we ask for an investment of \$6.5 billion in R&D funding, which would equate to 15% of overall funding from the federal government, to be set aside for our institutions to boost our R&D resources and opportunities on our campuses. Considering our institutions represent no less than 15% of the total number of IHEs participating in Title IV, this ask seems more than reasonable.¹⁰

4. Provide \$500 million for the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

We would like to commend the HEALS Act for acknowledging the urgent need to address the mental health and health disparities that have been disproportionately visited upon Americans of African ancestry, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Native American Pacific Islanders as a consequence of COVID-19. Given the adverse impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, and the fact that HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and other MSIs are in the communities of highest distress providing services such as mental health; physical and spiritual health; testing; nursing; doctoring; and counseling to families and communities that are succumbing disproportionately to COVID-19, we urge the Senate to increase the funding allocated for the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities in the HEALS Act from \$64.3 million to \$200 million to equal the amount allocated for the National Institutes of Mental Health. We also ask that priority in awarding grants and contracts to address COVID-19 and health disparities be given to the medical, public health, mental health, environmental health, and other relevant schools at HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs and AANAPISIs and to community-based health centers in their service areas by setting aside no less than 50% of these funds for grants to HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, PBIs, and other Minority-Serving Institutions to strengthen and grow their allied health education programs, including nutrition and dietetics.

5. Invest \$10 billion in infrastructure funding for HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, PBIs, and other Minority-Serving Institutions.

Due to our institutions being woefully under-resourced, enrolling large numbers of low-income, first-generation college students, and being mostly tuition-dependent, it is imperative that they are included in any funding proposal to boost our nation's infrastructure. Prior proposals that have been introduced focused a great deal on boosting infrastructure funding for k-12 education and remained silent for the higher education sector. Our institutions have dire infrastructure needs that often go unmet due to limited resources and the prioritization of ensuring there are quality academic programs at the risk of quality infrastructure. For example, HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, and AANAPISIs collectively comprise 800 of the nation's higher education institutions and enroll, and graduate, more than 4.8 million undergraduate students in the country. They are an essential part of

⁹ National Science Foundation. (2020). *Higher education R&D expenditures at high-Hispanic-enrollment institutions, ranked by all R&D expenditures, by source of funds: FY 2018*. Retrieved from <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/herd/2018/html/herd18-dt-tab033.html>

¹⁰ According to the most recent eligibility matrix produced by the Department of Education, a total of 1,099 institutions are eligible to receive funding in Titles III and V out of a total of 7,021 Title IV institutions.

America's higher education system and their unique strategic locations are mostly in the areas in which their roads, bridges, waterways, airports and other infrastructure serve as the gateways to American commerce. These institutions graduate a disproportionate percentage of the growing populations in America who are receiving degrees in the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, and other critical education and training required to improve our infrastructure. In some cases, our students are unable to benefit from the latest technology, lab equipment, upscale classrooms, libraries, and academic facilities simply due to funding. Overall, all of our institutions can lead in helping to realize an effort to shore up the Nation's infrastructure; energize communities; and seed intellectual, scientific, technological, and economic capital with the right institutional infrastructures and financial resources. While our institutions are appreciative of the ability to use their Titles III and V dollars to address some of these inequities, more is needed to position our institutions to realize their infrastructure needs and to lead America's infrastructure, technological and economic needs. Should the next COVID-19 relief package include any funding for infrastructure purposes, we ask for an investment of \$10 billion in HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs, PBIs, and other Minority-Serving Institutions.

6. Double the maximum Pell Grant award for students.

As a community, we all strongly believe in the need to increase federal grant aid for our students. The Federal Pell Grant serves as the cornerstone of student financial aid and has been a committed, continuous stream of funding for our low-income students. Due to the simple fact that the unemployment rate is higher than it was during the Great Depression and the persons of color are impacted to a much larger degree by this virus, students and families need all the help that they can get. While we understand that institutions would be allowed to use their institutional portion of funds to provide financial aid grants to students in the HEALS Act, we request a more direct and sustained support for students by urging Congress to double the maximum Pell Grant award to help our neediest students access college and persist in their efforts to obtain a postsecondary degree.

We thank you for your favorable consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Michael L. Lomax
President and CEO
UNCF



Harry L. Williams
President and CEO
TMCF



Lezli Baskerville
President and CEO
NAFEO



Antonio R. Flores
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OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates

Cc:

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice-Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patty Murray
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