

Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing

Testimony of Dr. Cheryl Davenport Dozier

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Good morning and thank you, Chairman Kingston, for this opportunity to testify about the importance of the TRIO programs throughout Savannah, rural Georgia, and throughout the United States. As the President of Savannah State University, the oldest, public historically Black university in Georgia, I know firsthand of your personal commitment to providing opportunity to all the people of our great state. Since 1966, Savannah State University has hosted TRIO programs and the effectiveness of these programs is seen in the business leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, engineers, scientists, and military officers I interact with daily in Chatham County.

The TRIO programs are authorized under the Higher Education Act to complement and leverage the effectiveness of our federal investment in financial aid programs. Nationally, TRIO serves 790,000 low-income students who aspire to be the first in their families to earn college degrees. TRIO students come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, with African American and Caucasian students each accounting for 33% of all TRIO students. Another 21% are Hispanic. Meanwhile, Asian and Pacific Island students comprise 5% of the TRIO student population and 3% of TRIO students are Native American. The remaining students come from multi-racial backgrounds. Thus, it can truly be said that TRIO cross-cuts all sectors of our society as poverty does not discriminate.

At Savannah State University, we are fortunate to host three TRIO programs, Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services. Our pre-college programs, Talent Search and Upward Bound, work with over 1,000 neighboring middle and high school students, providing intensive academic tutoring and counseling, as well as standardized test preparation and assistance with college admission and financial aid applications. These tools make it clear to students that college is a real possibility for them. Our work has been effective as in recent years both our Talent Search and Upward Bound programs have seen more than 80% of graduating high school seniors enroll directly in college. Ultimately, these types of services are crucial for Georgia's low-income youth. Currently, 46.8% of public schools students statewide qualify for free and reduced lunch. As poverty often correlates with poor academic performance, the Talent Search and Upward Bound programs at Savannah State University are helping to change the tide in our local community.

Additionally, hundreds of undergraduates at Savannah State University benefit from our Student Support Services program, which provides intensive and intrusive academic counseling that includes remediation for students who find themselves ill-prepared for the rigors of college work and course advising to ensure that students stay on the path to degree completion. As a result of these services, our Student Support Services program can boast of a significantly higher graduation rate than that of other low-income students on campus. TRIO programs work hand-in-hand with our federal investment in financial aid and, even other supports for low-income children and families, to boost completion rates for low-income college students. As such, TRIO is the fiscal insurance policy that helps ensure our nation's students succeed.

The programs at Savannah State University represent just a portion of the success resulting from TRIO, which includes programming that helps military veterans and out-of-work adult learners return to the classroom and earn postsecondary credentials. In turn, all of these programs fuel local economies by helping families transition out of poverty and creating an educated workforce.

There is no doubt in my mind that collectively, the pipeline of TRIO programs is invaluable to the economies of communities across Georgia. I'm sure that there are academic leaders at institutions across the nation who could share similar sentiments about the impact of the TRIO programs. Indeed, TRIO programs operate in virtually every congressional district of the United States and have successfully been producing college graduates for nearly 50 years.

In my current role as the President of Savannah State University, I recognize the importance of supportive services to make real the aspirations of so many young people and adults who are working hard to create better lives for themselves and their families. The support and information provided to low-income and first-generation students at critical times is often the difference in determining whether they persist and succeed in completing their college educations.

Georgia, as you well know, is undergoing significant change. We are growing quickly; in fact, our population grew 18% over the last decade. Such growth was driven largely by the migration of African Americans and Hispanics to the state. We are also a younger state, as more than one

quarter of our citizens are under the age of 18. We are an increasingly diverse state with the Hispanic population growing by nearly two-thirds in the last decade. TRIO programs are an important component of an opportunity infrastructure that allows all of our citizens to reach their full potential.

I recognize that we are in an era of extreme austerity, particularly with the recent implementation of sequestration. However, all of your constituents believe that it is Congress' responsibility to make the hard decisions, to set priorities, and to protect initiatives aligned with those priorities. Despite doing more with less and reducing the average cost per student, over the last 8 years, including sequestration, TRIO programs will have lost the ability to serve more than 120,000 students. I very much hope that under your leadership, Chairman Kingston, that this Subcommittee will reverse the TRIO cuts seen in the past and boost funding for these programs in future years. Thank you.