

Testimony of Antonio R. Flores, PhD, President & CEO, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

**Presented to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of the Subcommittee to discuss the importance of investing in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). My name is Antonio Flores and I am the President & CEO of the Hispanic Association Colleges and Universities (HACU). HACU was founded in 1986 and is the only national association that represents HSIs. These 559 HSIs enroll 5.1 million students in the United States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. I am here today to discuss HACU's Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 requests for Title V, Part A and Part B under the Department of Education. We urge you to fund our HSIs commensurate to their growth and student populations in a manner that would be fair and equitable by making the following historic investments in HSIs:

1. \$250,000,000 for Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Title V, Part A): \$67,150,000 above FY2022; and
2. \$100,000,000 for Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (Title V, Part B): \$80,340,000 above FY2022.

HACU commends the committee for increases to Title V Part A and Part B in recent years, including the \$34.12 million increase for Part A and \$5.81 million increase for Part B in FY2022. These funds are critical to HSIs as these are their main federal funding vehicles. Unfortunately, funding levels have not kept up with the number of HSIs. Since their codification in 1992 as part of the amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, HSIs have continued to grow exponentially from 311 in 2010 to 569 in 2019, for example. However, the pandemic saw the number of HSIs decrease, for the first time in 20 years, to 559, partly due to the economic and social impacts that disproportionately affected Hispanic students.

HSIs educate more than 5 million students, including two-thirds of the estimated 3.8 million Hispanic students in American higher education, most of whom are first-generation college students and come from low-income families. HSIs also enroll twice as many African American students as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), 41% of all Asian Americans, 21% of all Native Americans, and 16% non-Hispanic White students in U.S. higher education. Additionally, while only accounting for 16% of higher education institutions, HSIs enroll 31% of Pell recipients. Despite their great diversity and need, HSIs remain at the bottom of the federal funding priorities, compared to other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and HBCUs.

HSIs are consistently asked to do more with less. The first Congressional HSI appropriation in FY1995 was a meager \$12 million for more than 125 HSIs. As the number of HSIs has climbed rapidly, federal funding has been paltry over the years and amounted to a mere \$315.7 million in FY21, including \$221.6 in discretionary funds.

Coupled with persistent federal underfunding, COVID-19 has exacerbated the financial needs of HSIs: delayed deferred maintenance, access to broadband, classroom facilities enhancements, and much needed wrap-around student services, particularly health and psychological services. As the pandemic lingers on, the funding needs of HSIs will become more critical. In a report released by HACU in September 2021,¹ HACU surveyed HSIs and received 111 responses on their infrastructure needs that require capital financing. More than nine in every 10 HSIs need funding for construction of new buildings, facilities, and classrooms; eight of every 10 for deferred maintenance; three of every four for IT infrastructure; and more than two-thirds for repairs. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, HSIs already lacked sufficient funding and resources for up-to-date and “smart” technology equipped classrooms, state-of-the-art science laboratories, human patient simulators and skills labs, libraries, and other infrastructure needs. Currently, too many HSI classrooms are outdated and underequipped, libraries lack essential digital assets and holdings, and buildings are not equipped with the necessary broadband technology that has become a standardized part of the learning experience for all students.

Federal investments are essential to our HSIs in an effort to strengthen our workforce by enhancing educational attainment, especially in STEM and other fields of national priority. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that from 2010 to 2020 Hispanics, accounted for more than half the total growth of the national population and are now over 63 million, and it estimates that the Hispanic population will grow by 93.5% from 2016 to 2060.²

HSIs educate and train the most diverse and underserved communities and do so with fewer federal resources per student than their peer institutions. As the nation looks to rebuild the economy after the pandemic, it is critical that federal investments strengthen our workforce by enhancing the educational infrastructure of HSIs to pave the path of success and opportunity for Hispanic Americans for the FY2023.

As the Hispanic growth-rate in K-12 enrollment continues to accelerate, the number of Hispanic high-school graduates is expected to increase by 49% between 2012-13 and 2028-29, compared to 23% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and to a net drop of 3% and 15% for Blacks and Whites, respectively. In fact, NCES projected in the same study an increase of 14% in Hispanic college enrollment between 2017 and 2028 from 3.5 million to over 4.0 million, but it may be under-projecting as in 2020 there were already 3.8 million Hispanics college students, 67% of them at HSIs.³

Investing in HSIs is an investment in a successful American workforce. Given the preceding demographic trends and projections, it is evident that the nation’s labor force is also becoming increasingly Hispanic. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that Hispanics have the highest participation rate in the American labor force, which in 2019 was 66.8%, compared to 63.0% for Whites and 62.4% for Blacks.⁴

¹ <https://www.hacu.net/NewsBot.asp?MODE=VIEW&ID=3424>

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>

³ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020024abbrev.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/civilian-labor-force-participation-rate.htm>

A U.S. BLS study projected that the Latino share of the workforce will increase dramatically from 1 in 10 in 2010 to 1 in 3 by 2050, while Whites will decrease from 81% to 75%, Blacks will remain at 12%, Asian Americans will increase from 5% to 8% and all others from 2% to 5% during the same span of time.⁵ Currently, more than half of all the new workers joining the nation's labor force are Hispanic. For America to remain competitive in the global economy, a much better educated and trained Hispanic labor force is required. As the backbone of Hispanic postsecondary education, HSIs must be placed at the top of federal investment priorities without any further delay.

HACU and its supporters wholeheartedly commend the U.S. Congress and the Administration for investing significantly in HBCUs and other MSIs and urge them to continue doing so. Likewise, we exhort Congress and the President to invest with equal commitment in HSIs and their underserved students; they truly are the future of the nation.

Presented virtually on May 26, 2022.

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2012/10/art1full.pdf>