



BETHUNE-COOKMAN UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1904 by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune

Hiram C. Powell, Ph.D. Interim President

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sessions, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony regarding the February 1, 2022 Bomb Threat to Bethune-Cookman University, one of the nation's 107 HBCUs (Historically Black College and Universities).

As amended, The Higher Education Act of 1965, defines an HBCU as: "...any historically black college or university that was established before 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation."

Sadly, threats to Black churches and educational institutions are not relics of the past. Emma Green's 2015 Atlantic article, *Black Churches Are Burning Again in America* and the 2022 assaults on HBCUs through bomb threats remind us that these two African American institutions remain targets of unprovoked hatred and destruction.

According to a new statement from the FBI, 57 historically Black colleges and universities and houses of worship were targeted by bomb threats between Jan. 4 and Feb. 16 of this year. Whether bombs or other explosive devices are found, recent threats assail Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators forcing them to come face to face with the

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saying, “the more things change, the more they stay the same. We feel that bomb threats on the campuses of HBCUs accomplish precisely what they are intended to accomplish. They give African American students and all African American people a stark reminder of ongoing challenges to our safety...even in spaces called Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Bomb threats are thieves. Bomb threats steal the equilibrium found in routines and predictability and replace it with doubt and uncertainty. They steal time from everyone and, in its place, add unexpected and, therefore, unbudgeted expenses to the operating costs of HBCUs often struggling to balance their budgets. Mostly, bomb threats snatch away from students and others on campus any feeling that you are safe, secure, and can relax as you go and come because you are at an HBCU. Those feelings are, instead, replaced with questions like, “Why is getting an education a target of hate and intolerance toward us? “If I can’t be safe on an HBCU campus, where can I be safe? Is there any place where I can feel safe?” Awareness that six juveniles were identified as the source of the bomb threats at Bethune-Cookman did little to mitigate the emotional harm done. Instead, the knowledge that such young individuals were at the root of the threats caused us to wonder what factors and circumstances allow “kids” to believe that such actions against African American students are warranted?

Through this written testimony, Bethune-Cookman University hopes to help the Committee and the general public understand how members of the Bethune-Cookman University community felt and continue to feel about the February 1, 2022 bomb threat. Toward that end, our testimony includes reflections and comments from key areas of responsibility namely, the Office of the President, Department of Campus Safety,

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Department of Housing and Residence Life, the Office of Alumni Affairs, and Advancement. In addition, you will “hear” from the President of the Faculty Senate. More than 11,000 alumni are also a part of the B-CU family, therefore, our testimony includes statements from the Executive Director of Alumni Affairs and a few alumni. You will also hear from a sampling of students.

Dr. Hiram C. Powell, Interim President, Bethune-Cookman University:

“In November of 1920, Dr. Bethune stood firmly and prayerfully before the KKK when her school and its students were threatened; B-CU will always stand firm in its commitment to the continuing education and safety of its students, faculty, and staff.”

Mr. Gary Price, Executive Director of Campus Safety

Understandably, at the center of the University’s response to the February 1, 2022 bomb threat was its Department of Campus Safety. Mr. Gary Price, Chief of the Department reports that his sector received the first official warnings at 5.30 am and added that the executive branch of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Law Enforcement Executives and Administrators had been forewarned of the nefarious behavior toward HBCUs before the Federal Government publicized the threat.

Chief Price reports that once informed, his staff were able to assist the responding agencies with their investigative needs. The FBI responded four hours after the initial threat and made a variety of resources available to the Department and the University. It is Chief Price’s position that, while the bomb threat exposed the University to several areas of concern, it proved to be a catalyst for creating policies and to open lines of communications needed to address future threats. Because the Department of Campus Safety worked in concert with Daytona Beach Police Department and Volusia Sheriff’s Office (VSO) personnel, the investigation went smoothly and the campus returned to regular activity,

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eight hours after the first warnings were received and seven hours after the lockdown was announced. In the end, the bomb threat exposed areas of weakness while laying an important foundation for effective and sustained communication between Campus Safety, the Daytona Beach Police Department, and the Volusia Sheriff's office.

Mr. Perry Keel, Lead Residence Life Coordinator, Department of Housing and Residence Life

“There was a lot of activity that morning and like everyone else, I was concerned. Our students were updated regularly through our Campus Alert system. I applauded them because they were uniformly cooperative, patient but also concerned. Many called home and many others received calls from parents, other family members, and friends. As the morning hours turned into afternoon, the most growing concern among residential students was food. I confess that I wasn't sure what to expect, however, my confidence in how such a harrowing situation would be handled grew, as I watched various departments come together to effectively and efficiently work alongside outside law enforcement agencies.”

Dr. Wayne Shepard, Bethune-Cookman Faculty Senate President

Dr. Shepard received calls from faculty expressing confusion about what was going on. Some faculty had already arrived on campus not knowing they were exposed to the potential danger of a bomb. Dr. Shepard shared his thoughts saying, “The incident was very concerning to me. As a retired veteran, it was very shocking and alarming for me to encounter such a threat all because of the color of my skin. While all students are welcome, HBCUs came into existence to educate African Americans because of racism and segregation. We're in our yard bothering no one! No one, because of racism, should be threatened when they are in their own space.” The President of the Faculty Association wonders whether the day will ever come when African Americans are no longer threatened

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by individuals or groups who think it's alright to do so. Other faculty have also shared their thoughts:

Dr. Julius John, Director of Theatre

“This is yet another example of the assault on our minds and our sacred spaces...assaults that our people have had to endure for generations! Just as our ancestors did, we, too, shall overcome.”

Kimberly Woodard, Executive Director of Alumni Affairs and Development

Since 1941, Bethune-Cookman has been awarding undergraduate degrees. Today, more than 12,000 B-CU alumni live and work in communities throughout the United States and in many countries around the world. What happens at Bethune-Cookman matters to its graduates, many of whom return to campus each year for annual Homecoming events. Sharing her thoughts, Ms. Woodard says, “I’m proud that our alumni and students are not wavering behind the threats. We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors and this gives us strength and determination to not fear evil but continue our pursuit of excellence. Sadly, we continue to be confronted with threats against the lives of Black youth who are simply trying to pursue higher education to improve their lives for the benefit of us all. The bomb threat was especially painful after believing that genuine awareness and a growing understanding of racial injustice against African Americans were becoming a part of an emerging zeitgeist.

Sean Lyn, a B-CU alum and current staff member in the Office of Alumni Affairs and Development

“As an alum, I find it disheartening that my university, along with other HBCUs, received bomb threats, especially at a time when historically black colleges and universities are

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being recognized and celebrated for our excellence. What was done because of hatred towards us will strengthen us as an institution.”

Student reactions to the February 1, 2022 bomb threat include statements from

Jariah Bibbs, Orlando, FL

“It wasn’t until I started reading the emails that were being sent to us that I realized how serious the situation was. Learning that other HBCUs also received bomb threats caused the hairs on the back of my neck to rise because it was clear that HBCUs were being targeted. I asked myself, What if next time it’s not just a threat. There are always people who carry out their threats.”

Cameryn Williams, Tampa, FL.

“The series of bomb threats targeted at HBCUs are heinous crimes. When I heard we were on lockdown, I knew we had become one of the targets. Unfortunately, I expected us to become a target and I was emotionally equipped to handle the situation. I wonder how many of my peers are still struggling with what happened. I think that, if these threats had taken place at PWIs, the DOJ would have acted faster. It wouldn’t have taken multiple threats. The absence of federal action is a perfect example showing that Black Lives Don’t Matter.”

Kieyuana Gloster, Tampa, FL.

“Tuesday, February 1st, 2022, was the scariest day of my life. It was a day when my life flashed before my eyes. Worrying about whether I needed to pick up the phone to call my family and tell them this was the last time they would speak to me, I was afraid for my life. I was also angry! I asked myself why people have so much hatred towards African Americans. Days after the bomb threat, my nerves were still on edge, I couldn’t eat during the day or sleep at night. I prayed for my mental health and everyone else’s.”

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Scott Bandy – Palmdale, CA.

“You cannot stop us from educating ourselves. We will not retreat due to society’s fear of us making a better life for ourselves. We will not go quietly into the night.”

Claudette Cyril, West Palm Beach, FL

“I had mixed emotions about the bomb threat because it wasn’t my first time going through one at school. This particular bomb threat upset me because it was the first day of Black History Month which was probably intentional.”

Zhadeyn Hodge Sigars, Denver CO.

“I experienced a calm frustration because I am accustomed to these situations which should not be the case for anyone in this country.”

Jaida Brown, Eustis, FL.

“At school, I feel safe and free to move about. The bomb threat made me feel unsafe and scared to come out.”

Amir Moore, Ocoee, FL.

“Without knowing about the bomb threat, I left my building. Once I found out, I was completely unnerved and had a sense of dread, especially seeing so many streets blocked off by police vehicles. After learning that there was a real threat, my priority was informing all of my friends and mentors of what was happening on campus.”

Heavenly Boykin, Atlanta, GA.

“On February 1st, 2022, I woke up to an email from my work-study supervisor saying not to come to work because our university received a bomb threat. Unfortunately, I had a feeling that this was coming because other HBCUs were targeted in January. I knew it was a matter of time before Mary’s children were forced to experience the same trauma.

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I could look out my window and see police cars blocking the entrances into the residence buildings. I want to believe that B-CU has an effective response plan in case there is a real bomb. I also hope that the government has funds readily available to help universities in case a tragedy actually happens.”

Johnathan Archie

“For

years to come, I will remember the bomb threats that were sent to multiple HBCUs this semester. I still remember the first email that was sent regarding the bomb threats, telling us to remain in our dorms because it wasn't a drill. I remember feeling happy only because I had no classes that day but the fact that I couldn't leave my dorm to go anywhere worried me. Bombs can be planted anywhere and who's to say that a bomb hadn't already been planted in our dormitory. Horrible scenarios could have played out that day, and I'm just thankful that no one was hurt. This is a serious matter.”

The previous comments from students who were directly impacted by the February 1, 2022 bomb threat are a snapshot. One of the most distressing things about student reactions to the February 1, 2022 bomb threat is that several of them said that they weren't surprised. Even more disturbing is that quite a few said the words, “I was used to having bomb threats because we always had them in high school.” One student said that there were bomb threats all four of his high school years.

Federal Responses (Suggestions/Recommendations)

There is little reason to believe that bomb threats and other domestic terrorist behaviors aimed at HBCUs will diminish. Barring a sufficient federal response, they are likely to increase in number and intensity. While we can make suggestions, the federal government is in a much better position to know which of its many tools can and should be made

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available to HBCUs. Toward that end, we hope that the Federal Government will commit all available resources to prevent and mitigate such acts. We seek an authentic partnership between federal law enforcement agencies and HBCUs to develop sustained and robust dialogue. Because juveniles have been identified in connection with the bomb threat at Bethune-Cookman, opportunities to engage middle and high school students in meaningful dialogue with HBCU students should happen with adequate funding. In addition:

1. The DOJ should share information about threats and potential threats sooner.
The responding agency wasn't aware that several other HBCUs had received bomb threats ahead of the threat made to B-CU on February 1.

Before this incident, there had been little to no communication. We need federal agencies to continue to offer their services and training.

2. Investigations that are undertaken by federal law enforcement agencies into incidents of hate crimes should include not just the actual crime, but also motives and the climate that breeds and supports such actions.
3. Provide funding and support for the establishment of guidance, policies, and training for students, employees, and campus security at HBCUs.

As requested, we have compiled faculty, staff, and student reactions to the bomb threat made against Bethune-Cookman University on February 1, 2022, and sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

The pages of this testimony are a snippet of a day that no one at Bethune-Cookman will ever forget.

Educating the “head, heart, and hand” remains Bethune-Cookman University’s highest calling. Among the testimony provided by students was a kind of affirmation, “We will not go quietly into the night.” Dylan Thomas’s exact words are, “Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light. And so, we shall. Bethune-Cookman

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University, like the other 106 HBCUs, is a national treasure and, while our collective stories are in no way “rags to riches,” each HBCU is a visible example of vision, resolve, determination, perseverance, and faith...all inseparable from a belief in the promises of America.

We are available to answer questions connected to its contents.

Thank you.

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