

**“HBCUs at Risk: Examining Federal Support for
Historically Black Colleges and Universities”
Committee on Oversight and Reform
9:00 AM, Thursday, March 17, 2022
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney and Chairman Raskin for calling this important hearing to ensure the safety and support of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Since January, the FBI has documented at least 44 bomb threats against almost 60 HBCUs and Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs) across the country. These hate-filled threats of violence against storied institutions are despicable and shameful. I condemn these cowardly acts of white supremacy and hate crimes in the strongest, clearest way possible; while standing with my colleagues in support of the passage of H.Con.Res.70: A concurrent resolution condemning threats of violence against and reaffirming support for the students of HBCUs.

HBCUs serve as part of the critical foundation of our nation’s higher education system, representing opportunities for students with varied backgrounds. Today, more than 100 HBCUs around the United States enroll more than 300,000 students per year, representing three percent of all higher education students—yet they graduate 20 percent of African American students receiving undergraduate degrees. In fact, HBCUs graduate: 27 percent of all African-American STEM graduates; 40 percent of all African-American engineers; 50 percent of all African-American lawyers; 50 percent of all African-American public-school teachers; and 80 percent of all African-American judges. These individuals are the future leaders of small businesses, large corporations, and the agencies that comprise our federal government. Investments in and support for these institutions fortify the future of this country.

Providing students from often overlooked and undervalued communities with viable opportunities to succeed demands necessary tools, resources, and support structures. The Century Foundation—a think tank dedicated to economic, racial, and gender equity—recently published a study that uncovered the vast endowment gap between non-HBCUs and HBCUs, finding that “average endowments of public HBCUs are \$7,265 per student and \$24,989 per student at private HBCUs, compared to the average endowment of \$25,390 per student at public colleges and \$184,409 at private institutions.” Students at HBCUs are receiving between 71% and 85% fewer resources for their education when compared to their counterparts at other, more predominantly white, institutions. These data highlight what the Century Foundation calls “alarming inequities in funding and capacity at institutions that traditionally serve first-generation, Pell-eligible, low-income students.”

Moreover, a joint survey conducted by the United Negro College Fund, the Center for Responsible Lending and the University of North Carolina Center for Community Capital found that “44% of current Black student-loan borrowers at HBCUs reported skipping meals because they didn’t have enough money for food.” A key takeaway from the survey found that while the COVID-19 crisis took a toll on Black students nationwide, students at HBCUs felt resourcing shortages most acutely.

The Biden Administration continues to take this issue seriously and delivered a historic investment of \$3.7 billion in support of HBCUs through the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Collectively, 45 HBCUs across the nation have been able to eliminate \$1.6 billion in debt. In Virginia, more than \$141 million of ARPA funds have gone to bolster our five HBCUs, which will catalyze long overdue investments in debt relief; grant funding; financial support; capacity building; and research and development. This funding reaffirms the Biden Administration's commitment to supporting HBCUs and builds on last year's deliverance of \$3.2 billion to historic and under-resourced institutions under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). Collectively, ARPA; the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES); and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), provided more than \$76 billion of funding to HBCUS and minority serving institutions (MSI). Finally, the passage of the most recent omnibus guarantees \$885 million, an increase of \$96 million, for programs to strengthen HBCUs, MSI, and other historically under-resourced institutions of higher education serving a high percentage of low-income students.

The House of Representatives' HBCU Caucus, founded by Rep. Alma Adams, reported that 67% of job seekers say a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers, and organizations that report higher levels of racial diversity bring in nearly 15 times more sales revenue than their counterparts." Fostering HBCUs is a vital contribution to ensuring we have diverse talent that can rise to the challenges and seize the opportunities in the future.

It is both a moral and economic imperative that we fight to support HBCUs. I am proud to be a cosponsor of Congresswoman Adams' bill, H.R.3294, the Institutional Grants for New Infrastructure, Technology, and Education for HBCU Excellence Act, and of Congressman Schneider's bill, H.R. 350, the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act. These bills increase investments in infrastructure at HBCUs and provide funds that could be used to strengthen the safety and security of campuses which would enhance the government's ability to counter domestic terrorism. In addition, my bill, H.R. 6104, the Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act would help attract top talent from HBCUs into government by requiring federal agencies to pay all interns—removing economic barriers to the early career tracks of federal government. The bill would then provide extra points to federal job applicants who complete a year of federal internship service, rewarding experience and acumen and increasing recruiting efforts to rebuilding the federal civil service.

We must continue to support endeavors within government operations—such as the passage of H.R. 2486, the Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education (FUTURES) Act, which ensured \$255 million in annual federal funding for HBCUs; increased Pell Grant funding; and streamlined the FAFSA student loan applications process. Investing in HBCUs is investing in our future leaders – in the talent that will drive us through our future challenges. I look forward to working with Chairwoman Maloney and Chairman Raskin to ensure that we have provided the support these institutions need to foster the growth and development of our innovators and leaders.