

**Kylie Burke: Personal Testimony**  
***House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight & Reform***

Good morning and thank you to the committee for providing a platform for HBCU students to share their experiences. I'd like to first begin by introducing myself and sharing a campus tradition we call "*the Howard intro*" -- my name is Kylie Burke, a graduating senior political science major, psychology minor from the Bay Area.

And while I was born in Hayward, California I believe my journey to Howard, and to sitting here today, began in rural Frederica, Delaware.

My mother moved me and my sister back to her quiet childhood hometown just before I started kindergarten. From my incredibly young vantage point, I grew up watching the many sacrifices required of her while she worked to rebuild our lives. She managed multiple jobs without complaint, put herself through University as a single mother, and stretched food stamps.

I have vivid memories of routinely sneaking into her room late at night while she was studying and asking to sleep on the far side of her bed, which was more covered with an assorted spread of highlighters, books, and note cards than decorative pillows. She would occasionally indulge me by letting me attempt to quiz her, but even when she didn't I always watched in amazement and dreamt of the day I'd be in college myself.

I am eternally grateful for the example she set and the sacrifices she made to propel our family forward. However, in all those nights I spent curled at her side dreaming of my own future, I would have never imagined the incredible purpose, community, and opportunities waiting for me at Howard University.

The mere chance to walk the famed halls of a historic campus that to this day echos with the greatness of former students such as legendary activists Pauli Murray, literary genius Toni Morrison, and the first female Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris was already unimaginable -- but the opportunity to contribute to that legacy was simply priceless.

My eagerness to contribute, while powerful, is not unique. Across the country, there are over 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities<sup>1</sup> developing great minds of a similar fortitude. My family's story of resilience, growth, and the important emphasis placed on education is a familiar one on HBCU campuses as well; many of us walking across the stage this spring will be the first in our families to graduate college, pursue graduate degrees, and advance our family's economic future.

<sup>1</sup>[United Negro College Fund \(UNCF\) : National Center for Education Statistics](#)

And I understand that everyone does not have the first-hand experience of walking across the yard or speaking with brilliant HBCU students in a classroom -- fortunately, though, the numbers speak for themselves.

While Historically Black Colleges and Universities represent a small fraction of all four-year higher education options for students, we are the embodiment of “doing more with less” -- 80% of the country’s African American judges, 50% of lawyers, and 40% of engineers are HBCU graduates<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, Howard Medical School alone produces 50% of the country’s Black medical doctors, many of whom go on to serve in underserved communities where care is needed most, yielding an impact that simply cannot be quantified.

So when biggoted, cowardice actors began to issue violent bomb threats to Howard University and dozens of HBCUs at the start of 2022 it was clear that their intentions were to dismantle sacred pinnacles of Black excellence. Unmistakably, the highest concentration of threats were delivered on the first day of Black History Month<sup>3</sup>.

Since February 1, more than half of all HBCUs in the country<sup>4</sup> have received similar bomb threats. However, I am here today to let this committee know that we not only vehemently condemn all perpetrators attempting to induce fear on our campuses but to emphasize that our resilience stands as a testament to the fact that no threat -- real or factitious -- that could ever stand against our legacy, our community, and our commitment to supporting each other.

Yet and still, the added stress and in some cases paranoia students, faculty, and staff have subsequently experienced cannot be understated and has caused Universities to react in real-time while balancing two crucial approaches: first, the need to protect/secure campus and secondly addressing the mental health needs of the campus community.

As the President of the Howard University Student Association, it was my responsibility to aid those efforts as well. Immediately, our team began working to connect students to information and the necessary resources they need. We coordinated a series of “leadership briefings” connecting student to senior leadership overseeing the University’s response including the Chief of Police, COO, and Vice President of Student Affairs and worked to establish “Healing at Howard” -- a counselor-led session providing a much needed safe space for students and staff to share their anxieties/experiences with each other.

Howard and many other HBCUs also made the important decision to provide “mental health days” following the threats as well; acknowledging the weight of anxiety felt on campus after students were repeatedly woken up to safety alerts as late as 2AM, leaving us constantly on edge as it felt the “next threat” was all but imminent.

<sup>2</sup> [Thurgood Marshall College Fund](#)

<sup>3</sup> “Bomb Threat at Howard University Continues Recent Targeting of HBCUs” ([Newsweek](#))

<sup>4</sup> “FBI reports at least 57 bomb threats to HBCUs, other institutions since January” ([Washington Post](#))

I am both proud and grateful for the attention, unity, and support the HBCU community has demonstrated throughout this year. At the very same time, I also recognize that Howard University has the privilege of being housed in the Nation's capital with proximal access to federal agency support and assistance, unlike most of our peers.

I share all this in the hopes that this context provides you all with a better, more tangible understanding of what it means to attend an HBCU and what resources are and are not commonly available to our communities.

I also hope that I have been exceedingly clear in defining what exactly is at stake if these institutions are to be neglected, either financially or physically ... because when you support Historically Black Colleges & Universities what you are truly supporting is the next generation of Black lawyers, filmmakers, engineers, artists, doctors, and even politicians -- you are supporting a better future, one where young Black students know there is a safeguarded intellectual and cultural community waiting to support them.

And if that is not worth defending, funding, and championing I am not sure what is.