



## Miami Dade College

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Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Subcommittee on Government Operations

Dr. Eduardo J. Padron, College President

Miami Dade College's (MDC) Wolfson Campus is located in an urban environment, surrounded by office buildings, residential and government buildings in the middle of a vibrant downtown. Several of our other College campuses are located in high density urban areas as well. This includes our InterAmerican campus in Little Havana, Hialeah Campus and Doral Campus. Thus, we view with great interest the existence of vacant, underutilized properties in the vicinity of our campuses. MDC is the nation's largest institution of higher education, welcoming more than 175,000 students this year. Our commitment to provide access to college level learning throughout our community reflects the workforce demands of a dynamic economic environment. The College's growth dictates that we explore creative approaches, form partnerships and follow up on every opportunity. This includes challenging ones like the Dyer Courthouse, adjacent to our downtown Wolfson Campus main building.

Miami Dade College supports Congress' efforts seeking the efficient utilization of federally owned vacant properties. As you look to streamline the federal property disposal process, I believe this institution can serve as a model demonstrating the important role the education sector can play in assisting your efforts. I believe there is a great opportunity to fully engage with colleges and universities that are experiencing explosive growth. We stand ready to assist our federal partners in the conversion of vacant buildings, and in our case, even underutilized parking lots, into vibrant centers for learning and culture. Transforming these dormant properties into centers for learning and expanded opportunity represents the wisest use of our tax dollars.



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This College already has a track record of successfully converting underutilized properties, restoring historic buildings, and creating significant community gathering and learning places for the benefit of our entire community.

One successful example of this commitment sits adjacent to our campus --- the Freedom Tower, designated as a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior. This building is recognized as the "Ellis Island of the South" for its role in serving as the site of the federal government processing center which resettled hundreds of thousands of Cuban refugees during the 60's and 70's, including yours truly.

The Terra Group and the Pedro Martin Family donated this building to the College in 2005, one of the most significant donations in Miami's history. Prior to this the Freedom Tower's future appeared shaky; building ownership had changed hands over the years and the structure was in need of maintenance and repair. Under College ownership, the building has been renovated and once again anchors downtown Miami's main thoroughfare. The remarkable New World mural, which greeted every arriving immigrant, has been restored, and the tower's steeple, with its iconic sailing ship at the apex, reflects the building's historic significance.

The Freedom Tower is flourishing as a destination point for our students, locals and tourists alike, serving as an educational and cultural hub and a significant anchor in the economic revitalization of urban Miami. It now houses a museum quality exhibit space that has showcased the works of Salvadore Dali, Francisco de Goya and aspiring local artists. The renovated meeting space has hosted First Lady Michelle Obama, Governor Rick Scott, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Queen Sofia of Spain among others.

Given the chance, this is the type of future we envision for the Dyer Courthouse. Before I address that issue, allow me to briefly relate an additional success story that is even more pertinent to our discussion. It is federally-owned property conveyed to the College in 2009. This property, a fenced-in downtown flat parking lot currently serving Bureau of Prisons and Department of Justice employees, abuts our MDC New



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World School of the Arts Building. It literally wraps around this campus building. Several years ago we began meeting with the Bureau of Prisons to express our interest in working with them to better utilize this space.

We were able to combine their need for secure parking with our need to expand and grow. After some negotiation, we forged an agreement to convey the parking lot to the College in return for constructing a classroom/parking garage building that includes an enclosed and secure parking area for our federal partners. Working with them and alongside our Congressional delegation, we were able to get conveyance legislation approved by Congress and signed by the President in an efficient and timely manner. Today, we are finishing the design plans for the new building and anticipate a groundbreaking ceremony in the very near future.

Mr. Chairman, these federal partners were willing to work with us. Even more importantly, while they had certain requirements for the property, I believe they understood the impact of our College programs.

The point I wish to emphasize is that we were able to come to this agreement with minimum bureaucracy. We had federal partners who were willing to hear us out. They understood the value of our work, and the benefit for the entire community of our coming together in the more efficient utilization of this parking lot. This was accomplished without time consuming layers of review and unnecessary screenings and delay.

Upon completion this building will represent the end result of a model federal/local partnership. It will remind us of what we can accomplish by working together with our federal partners. Much like the Freedom Tower, it will suggest the future that awaits the Dyer Building -- if we are given the chance.

As the U.S. Congress and this committee look for ways to ensure the efficient utilization of federal properties throughout the United States, there is great interest in reforming the federal disposal process. I applaud this effort to streamline this process. During the last Congress we saw several measures introduced which



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established procedures for selecting federal properties to sell and for the distribution of the proceeds. Everything was on the table, from a military BRAC model of real property disposal, better real property data collection, enhanced duties for an interagency group, enhanced leasing and much more.

As new legislation is being proposed, your efforts to improve government efficiency and to generate revenue for the Treasury are to be commended. However, focusing on maximizing fair market sales should not be your only option. In many cases the costs of bringing a property to market exceed the proceeds from a sale. Legislative provisions emphasizing quick and maximum sale should be balanced with a focus on the community benefit as well. The option of maximizing a fair market value sale should be weighed against the community value of a public benefit conveyance. The end result will be a better utilization of these federal properties to the benefit of our communities and nation.

This community benefit can be quantified. Miami Dade College commissioned an economic impact study by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. Its findings indicated MDC to be a sound investment from multiple perspectives. This study quantifies the economic benefits and translates these into common sense benefit/cost and investment terms. From the perspective of our community as a whole, MDC students expand our economic base through their higher incomes, which are a direct result of their college education. Businesses that employ them also become more productive through student-added skills. Higher earnings of MDC students and associated increases in state income expand the tax base by 575.8 million each year. These benefits, together with the associated ripple effects, amount to an overall economic impact on the Miami-Dade County economy of \$3.1 billion each year.

As MDC students achieve higher levels of education, they are also less likely to become wards of the state, draw welfare or unemployment benefits, or engage in crime. This translates into associated dollar savings (i.e. avoided costs) to the public equal to approximately \$35.4 million annually. From a taxpayer perspective, the College's work results in increased tax collections from higher income earners) and



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reduced government expenditures. This study found a positive rate of return for MDC of 10.0%, and benefit/cost ratio of 2.9 ---- meaning every tax dollar invested in MDC today returns \$2.90.

By extension, the findings of this economic impact study underscore the benefits that will accrue to taxpayers should the Dyer Building become part of the College, and additional opportunities for learning are made available.

Lastly, it is important for me to note that the College is working with the GSA. We have responded to a Request for Information, sharing our plans and vision for the Dyer Building as an educational and cultural center. We have been meeting with GSA representatives as we await their internal process of review and screening—a process that is inching forward. We have invited the GSA Administrator to visit our downtown Wolfson Campus and allow us to provide an introduction and tour of the Freedom Tower.

Mr. Chairman, we will continue to reach out to this agency, to our Congressional delegation, to all of you on this committee, and to the community at large. Our proposed plan for the Dyer Building is starting to generate community support. We have received a letter of support from the Dade Heritage Trust which underscores our commitment to preserving the historic legacy of this building. We have also received a resolution of support from the Downtown Development Authority, recognizing the positive impact of our plans on Miami's economy. In addition, we have received a letter of support from Chief Judge Federico Moreno.

Our message is simple. Miami Dade College sees great potential in converting the Dyer Building into an educational and cultural center. We propose a new chapter for this historic building that will be rich in promise for all. We hope our federal partners will give us this chance.

Thank you.