

Testimony of

**Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.
14th President of Virginia State University And
Chair, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities'
Council of 1890 Universities**

**Before the United States House of Representatives
Agriculture Committee**

*1890 Land Grant Institutions:
Investing for Agricultural Resiliency, Equity, and Global Impact*

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Good morning. Thank you, Chairman David Scott, Vice Chair Alma Adams, and Ranking Member Glenn Thompson, for convening today's hearing with the 1890 Universities. I am Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, 14th President of Virginia State University and current Chair of the APLU Council of 1890 Universities. On behalf of the faculty, students, alumni and communities our universities serve, I want to thank you for the investments to the 1890s in the 2018 Farm Bill and in the American Recovery Plan. They have been critical in allowing us to grow our academic programs, conduct important agricultural research, and extend our university-based knowledge beyond our campus walls so communities can prosper and grow.

In particular, I would like to recognize and applaud the support of Congress, and especially you, Representative Scott, for your vision and leadership for the new 1890 Scholarship Program. This program has allowed us to recruit and retain the next generation of agriculture leaders, who will continue to keep our food supply chain safe, affordable and a positive contributor to our country's GDP growth. The scholarship program has allowed students like Sherod Archie to complete his Freshman year at Virginia State University this year as an agriculture business and economics major. Sherod is a first-generation college student from a single parent family, where his mother worked three jobs to provide for her four sons, her aging parents and a handicapped brother. According to Sherod, the 1890 Scholarship Program — and I'm quoting him here — "...is a chance to pursue my passions and improve my way of life in ways I never thought possible."

Of course, launching this program during a pandemic was not easy. Sherod was one of 17 students last year to receive a full scholarship at VSU through the program. And we hope to significantly increase that number in future years, when students can enjoy coming back to campus. We also hope the next Farm Bill will include language to continue this scholarship opportunity for future students like Sherod.

I would also like to thank and applaud Vice Chair Alma Adams for her efforts to invest in our HBCU facilities and capital infrastructure through the introduction of the IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act. These investments will allow for our institutions to provide students with state-of-the-art learning environments and enable HBCUs to continue to be a critical source of diversity in the workforce.

I'd be remiss if I didn't applaud the Congresswoman and members of the Education and Labor Committee — and really all members of Congress — for the work you did on the loan forgiveness of the Capital Financing Program last session. Thank you.

1890 land-grant universities, like my own, VSU, serve as our states' leader in supporting socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Earlier this month, we were honored to host Congresswoman Spanberger and our own former College of Agriculture Dean, Jewel Bronaugh, in her new role as USDA Deputy Secretary, as she addressed the details of the \$4 billion program for redressing the decades of USDA loan discrimination against Black and other socially disadvantaged farmers. This listening session and town hall represents the partnership the 1890s have with the USDA and is just one of the many ways we work together to assist Black and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. And, we are at a critical moment to do more, with your help.

I encourage Congress to support robust funding increases for the 1890 land-grant programs so we can make even more positive impacts for our country's citizens through our academic, research and Cooperative Extension programs. For example, by increasing the number of 1890s Centers of Excellence from our current six, we will be better able to increase the rural prosperity of underserved farming communities; address critical needs for enhanced international training and development; and increase the diversity of students in STEM fields.

Additionally, we encourage your support to address the healthcare infrastructure COVID-19 has demonstrated we don't have in place to care for our students on campus, as well as the digital infrastructure we need to deliver assistance to individuals, families and communities during and after the pandemic.

In closing, I ask you to invest in America's future by investing in the 1890s land-grant universities. We have a 131-year track record of providing a strong return on investment for every federal dollar that has supported our programs, and I can assure you that trend will only continue. I look forward to covering many other areas in our question-and-answer session today like our ongoing challenges with state matching grants and what Congress can do to help. Thank you.