United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–0905

June 16, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Whip
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Leader McConnell and Majority Whip Thune:

We are writing to request your continued consideration of the needs of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as we work to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with the Administration, Congress has taken great strides towards strengthening the capacity and competitiveness of our nation's HBCUs through meaningful legislation and regulatory relief, including in the context of the novel coronavirus pandemic. As we enter into preliminary discussions of a potential Phase IV relief and recovery bill, we encourage you to keep the needs of these indispensable institutions in mind, identifying opportunities to address ongoing challenges that HBCUs face, but also to leverage the diverse tools and perspectives that these schools offer in order to combat COVID-19 and recharge the American economy.

The past few years have seen an unprecedented show of support from Congress and the Administration for HBCUs. Last year, the Senate unanimously approved the HBCU PARTNERS Act, which would promote partnerships between HBCUs and federal agencies. Ultimately, both chambers took bipartisan action to pass the FUTURE Act, securing permanent funding for these institutions and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), in addition to simplifying the FAFSA process. The enactment of this landmark legislation marked the culmination of a series of more targeted legislative victories, from furthering the goals of our 1890 land-grant institutions in the most recent Farm Bill to reauthorizing the HBCU Historic Preservation Program. Earlier this year, we built upon this legacy of support by directing more than $1 billion in CARES Act relief funding to HBCUs and other MSIs, above and beyond their standard allotments.

As these institutions work to direct their CARES Act allocations towards providing their students with a high-quality education online, many HBCUs continue to struggle to meet current and prospective needs. Broadband access remains a major hurdle for far too many students and schools, particularly in rural areas, and some institutions lack the capacity to deliver scalable educational solutions outside of the in-person setting. **We must help to equip HBCUs with the technological infrastructure necessary to weather this storm and maintain their growing momentum.**

In addition to expanding broadband access and facilitating a technological infrastructure scale-up, we should look to HBCUs and MSIs as invaluable partners in American innovation and in meeting the needs of minority communities, which have borne a disproportionate burden in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Congress should seek to identify opportunities to ensure that HBCUs have a seat at the table as we seek to better understand COVID-19 and other biomedical challenges, along with their varied impacts.** This pandemic has highlighted both the lifesaving potential of American research and areas of need for further academic inquiry. Many HBCUs are well-poised to research COVID-19, develop potential treatments, provide high-quality care, test infected or potentially infected patients, conduct clinical trials, and serve as a conduit for disadvantaged communities.

As we transition into discussions on how best to assist in and accelerate the economic recovery, we urge you to consider diverse avenues of support for HBCUs and MSIs. Collaboration among our colleagues in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle will prove essential as we look to craft targeted solutions to the challenges facing our schools during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Senator Tim Scott
United States Senator

Senator Kelly Loeffler
United States Senator

Senator Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

Senator Thom Tillis
United States Senator

Senator David A. Perdue
United States Senator