



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 22, 2016

The Honorable John Boozman
U.S. Senator
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rick Crawford
U.S. Representative
1711 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator
124 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Womack
U.S. Representative
1119 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Boozman and Cotton and Representatives Crawford and Womack:

On behalf of the students, faculty, staff, and supporters of Philander Smith College located in Little Rock, Arkansas, I write to urge you to support the Shift Back to Society Act (H.R. 5644). This innovative bill introduced by Representative French Hill is a pilot program that would provide educational opportunities for qualified offenders enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The Shift Back to Society Act would help ex-offenders and soon-to-be ex-offenders successfully transition back into society by facilitating access to quality educational attainment. The bill would provide five-year grants to a maximum of ten HBCUs to offer inmates on the path for release an assortment of opportunities to earn college credits including: GED courses, college-career readiness programs, and baccalaureate and doctoral degrees. Recognizing that by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary training; this legislation is a step in the right direction.

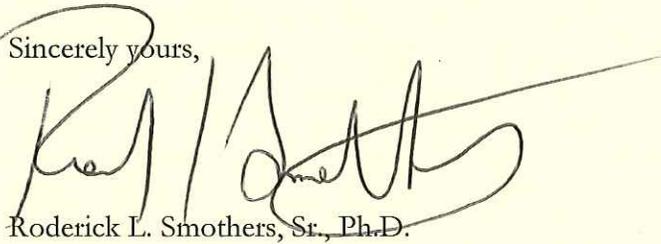
HBCUs have long served traditional and non-traditional students from diverse backgrounds and are well-positioned partners for this pilot initiative. At Philander Smith, we have implemented a social justice institute designed to expand community consciousness and student engagement. Arkansas Baptist College has a unique partnership with the Department of Community Correction which offers an entrepreneurship program for prison inmates during the last six months of their sentence. In addition, Shorter College is among three HBCUs and 67 institutions of higher learning that were recently declared experimental sites for the U.S. Department of Education's Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, which awards Pell Grants to 12,000 financially needy incarcerated students.

We know that education is the great equalizer that has a transformative effect on all students, especially those in correctional facilities. Inmates are half as likely to go back to jail if they take college courses. Yet over the past 30 years, state and local prisoner expenditures have outpaced state and local student spending. The Shift Back to Society Act is cost effective and factors in a 50

percent match requirement which can be offset by in-kind goods or services—a welcome provision for HBCUs with tight fiscal constraints.

The Shift Back to Society Act provides individuals who have paid their debt to society with a viable pathway toward self-sufficiency and is greatly needed in communities throughout our country. I applaud Representative Hill for his leadership on this issue and urge you to support this important bill.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roderick L. Smothers, Sr.", written over a horizontal line.

Roderick L. Smothers, Sr., Ph.D.
President

cc: U.S. Representative French Hill
U.S. Representative Bruce Westerman