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February 28, 2020

The Honorable Asa Hutchinson
Governor of Arkansas
500 Woodlane St
State Capitol Room 250
Little Rock, AR 72201-1088

Dear Governor Hutchinson:

I write to you today to encourage your continued and enhanced support of Arkansas's four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU): Arkansas Baptist College, Philander Smith College, Shorter College, and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

In Arkansas, HBCUs have served thousands of young and adult students and helped them achieve their dreams of a college education.

These schools provide so much hope to our state by improving our local communities, empowering our students, and growing our economy. As Vice Chair of the Bipartisan Congressional Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Caucus, and as the representative in Congress of three of Arkansas's four HBCUs, I believe it is critical that we continue to invest in these students and provide them with a bright future.

I want to thank you again for participating in the 2019 Arkansas HBCU Summit that I hosted on April 15, 2019. I was pleased to see such a willingness from a diverse cross-section of Arkansans to come together in support of these unique institutions that offer an educational pipeline, specific supports, and accessible culture that is ideal for many people that may not otherwise be inclined towards higher education.

In follow-up conversations with attendees of the summit, including the HBCU presidents, government officials, and private-sector representatives, a consistent theme has risen to the forefront: the need for state and local government agencies to show leadership in supporting these schools who do much with little.

HBCUs in Arkansas comprise thirteen percent of the state's universities yet produce twenty-eight percent of the state's African American college graduates. As a result, these institutions play a disproportionately significant role with respect to workforce diversity.

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As you are aware, on February 28, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order in support of our nation's HBCUs, reestablishing the White House Initiative on HBCUs and initiating the President's Board of Advisors on HBCUs. Perhaps the most notable and far-reaching component of this order was his missive to thirty-one federal government agencies to align their institutional missions alongside the HBCUs with which they regularly interact. Specifically, the agencies are directed to develop annual plans to "strengthen the capacity" of those schools.

The support given from the federal level would be greatly enhanced if matched at the state and local level. Federal investments alone are not enough to sustain HBCUs for the next few decades. We must have state and local investments not only for financial stability, but also for the "look" of support from people who live, work, and play in the same cities as the HBCUs that serve them.

I write today to urge you to replicate the president's efforts by issuing an order directing the state agencies to develop HBCU plans and actively cultivate relationships with these schools that will boost their, and consequentially our state's, competitiveness in the evolving global economy.

We have seen how successful these efforts can be already. Arkansas's HBCUs are working with state agencies to educate and empower returning citizens as a means for the state to reduce recidivism. Specifically, Shorter College and Arkansas Baptist have developed associate degree and certificate programs designed to quickly move students into the workforce, with great success.

Every student in America deserves the opportunity to succeed. For thousands of students in Arkansas, HBCUs offer the tools – through valuable educational resources – to take full advantage of those opportunities.

I thank you for your consideration of my request and encourage you to reach out to my staffer, Lesley Hill, at either (202) 225-2506 or Lesley.Hill@mail.house.gov, with any questions.

Sincerely,



French Hill
Member of Congress