October 4, 2017

Re: Congressional Black Caucus Alternative Budget for Fiscal Year 2018

Dear Representative:

I am writing as the CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the only 501 (c)(3), tax exempt membership association representing the nation’s Historically Black Universities (HBCUs) and emerging Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) and the 700,000 student enrollees, 72,000 faculty, and roughly 7 million alumni associated with these institutions. Today, NAFEO represents 106 public and private HBCUs and 50 PBIs in 35 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. Virgin Islands. I am writing in support of the Congressional Black Caucus Alternative Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 (“CBC Budget”). The CBC Budget calls for fiscally sound and morally conscientious revenue and savings, new investments, and net deficit reduction. We urge you to support the CBC Budget which recommends a fair tax code that will allow Congress to reinvest in communities, such as infrastructure and school modernization, energy infrastructure and broadband access, adult and youth job programs, neighborhood revitalization, and a package that protects the safety net and helps to eradicate poverty. Also, the CBC Budget includes aid for those areas ravaged by the recent Hurricanes. NAFEO supports the entire budget, and we highlight certain sections below:

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

NAFEO supports the CBC Budget recommendations to increase access to high quality education and make college more affordable. NAFEO, the only membership association of its kind, was founded by the presidents and chancellors of HBCUs and PBIs to represent the issues and interests of these richly diverse public, private and land-grant, two- and four-year, graduate and professional, historically and predominantly black colleges and universities. The organization provides an international voice for the nation's HBCUs and other equal educational opportunity institutions; advocates for policies, programs and practices to preserve and enhance HBCUs; and increases the active participation of underrepresented minorities in higher education and in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs in American higher education. The CBC Budget would fully fund the Every Student Succeeds Act, and the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and invest in increasing access to higher education and HBCUs. It would further provide affordable pathways for students, by providing grants, reducing interest rates, and increasing Pell Grant awards.
INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNIVERSITIES

NAFEO supports the CBC Budget recommendations to ensure targeted investments for our most vulnerable communities. NAFEO endorses the CBC Budget recommendation to rebuild our nation’s infrastructure and reinvest in our communities. NAFEO supports a $1 trillion infrastructure rebuilding proposal, especially one that places HBCUs at its epicenter, because of their unique strategic locations, mostly in the areas in which the roads, bridges, waterways, airports and other infrastructure serve as the gateways to American commerce, and because HBCUs are graduating disproportionate percentages of the growing populations in America who are receiving degrees in the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, architecture, urban and rural planning, and other critical education and training required to improve our infrastructure. HBCUs also possess faculty, staff, students, goods, services, and promising practices, position them well to drive the new infrastructure initiative, the revitalizing of urban and rural America, the economic stimulus and STEAM agendas. Indeed, some HBCUs are serving as “Communiversities” – the epicenters for the revitalization of urban and rural America for shoring up infrastructures; energizing communities; seeding intellectual, scientific, technological, and economic capital; and ensuring healthy, sustainable, communities.

HURRICANE SUPPORT

NAFEO supports the CBC Budget recommendation to provide a $200 billion down payment to aid victims of recent hurricanes. As noted above, NAFEO represents 106 HBCUs including the University of the Virgin Islands (“UVI”). The UVI President, Dr. David Hall, has shared that the University has endured tremendous challenges associated with the recent hurricanes, and is in dire need of operating funds. Dr. Hall writes “Due to the problems the Territory is facing as a result of the two [now three] hurricanes, and their financial impact, the monthly allotments to the University ha[ve] not been received. We receive approximately $2.6 million each month from the local government and without those funds we will cease to operate. We are resuming classes on October 9th and the University will need to pay its employees and address other critical needs. Federal funding specifically earmarked to the University to operate would be extremely helpful and valuable.”

Representative, we need your leadership to ensure that our nation’s budget reflects our priorities and especially the needs of our students. The CBC Budget focuses on meeting the needs of our nation. We look forward to working with members of Congress to advance a budget that reflective of what we need and deserve.

Sincerely,

Lezli Baskerville

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