

June 12, 2020

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee
2358-B Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Subcommittee Chairwoman DeLauro, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Cole:

We thank you for your dedicated leadership in addressing our nation's parallel economic and public health crises.

As you know, COVID-19 has devastated the livelihoods and health of Americans of all walks of life, but the economic and health burdens have not been borne equally. Rather these burdens have fallen disproportionately on communities of color, reflecting decades of systematic inequalities.

As members of the Congressional Black Caucus, we therefore respectfully petition you to prioritize the needs of minority communities (including social determinants of health, such as nutrition) and the key institutions that serve them—including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) – as you work on the next phase of the coronavirus relief bill. Specifically, we've identified the following areas for prioritization.

A Diverse Nutrition and Dietetics Workforce

COVID-19's disproportionate impact on communities of color has made the need for health professional workforce diversity and culturally competent care more urgent than ever. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Primarily Black Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Institutions have long been leaders in addressing health equity in America. Specifically, HBCUs graduate 43% of all African Americans with postsecondary degrees in sciences, technology engineering, mathematics (STEM) fields and roughly 15% of all African American physicians.

Despite this success, gaps remain. In particular, African Americans and Hispanics account for only 2% and 3% of registered dietitians/nutritionists, respectively, nationwide. This is especially concerning given that that unhealthy diets contribute to many of the comorbidities (hypertension, diabetes, obesity) that place one at increased risk from COVID-19. Moreover, for these fields in particular, cultural competency and relatability is central to achieving successful patient engagement and motivating healthful dietary changes. The low numbers of minority dieticians and nutritionists reflects a lack of adequate resources among MSIs to realize their full potential in diversifying these fields.

Consequently, **we request \$300 million in targeted Department of Education funding** for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs to strengthen and grow their allied health education programs, including nutrition and dietetics. We also **request \$10 million in outreach funding to encourage underrepresented racial/ethnic students to pursue careers in nutrition**. In doing so, we strengthen our response to health disparities now and long term.

Other Key Provisions

Similarly, we also request prioritization for the following provisions:

- HEROES Act (HR 6800) Section 30615, which would provide \$1 billion in grants to increase medical student diversity, as well as, targeted funding to medical schools in rural regions, underserved areas, and MSIs.
- HEAA (HR 6377) Sections 301 and 302, which would establish a comprehensive set of programs, grants, and working groups to improve health professional workforce diversity.

Given the importance of culturally component care and the need to address social determinants of health (such as nutrition), we ask that you make these provisions a priority in future COVID-19 relief bills.

Sincerely,

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress