

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 27, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos  
Secretary  
United States Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202-8510

Secretary DeVos:

As concerned Members of Congress with a vested interest in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the students they serve, we write with apprehension regarding the disproportionate loss of Upward Bound programs at these institutions during the FY17 grant competition. We request clarity regarding this disparity, urge you to provide targeted technical assistance to these HBCUs as they make plans to apply for the next project period in 2021, and ask that you strongly consider the HBCUs that apply for the Veterans Upward Bound competition, which ends on June 21, 2017.

Upward Bound, created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, has been consequential in counteracting the many barriers that prevent low-income, first-generation students from going to college. For American children not born into wealth and privilege, one missed deadline, financial aid application error, or incorrect standardized test question can be detrimental to their ability to get into college. The Upward Bound program has been a critical asset to our HBCUs by providing millions of their students with the security of an academic support system that can eliminate achievement gaps existing between the rich and the poor and between HBCU students and those that attend other institutions.

The role Upward Bound plays for students at HBCUs across the country is steeped in a sacred history. The Upward Bound program at Miles College in Birmingham was founded in the year following Alabama Governor George Wallace's "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" and the violent murder of 4 little girls at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church just miles from Miles College. For the first time in over 50 years, Miles College will no longer have an Upward Bound Program. Tuskegee University, Clark Atlanta University, West Virginia State University, Savannah State University are just some of the HBCUs where Upward Bound programs were founded during the pivotal years of the Civil Rights Movement and have lost their Upward Bound programs this year.

Since HBCUs were created to educate a historically underserved community, they face substantial challenges achieving financial stability and accessing capital. As a result, every federal program that infuses resources and creates enrollment pipelines is integral to the overall vitality of our HBCUs. This is why it is particularly problematic that a large number of our HBCUs lost funding for their Upward Bound programs in the FY2017 grant competition. Many programs at Predominantly White

Institutions (PWIs) are sustained by institutional commitment from the university; however, HBCUs do not always have the same resources to compensate for the loss in services. The stakes of program closures at HBCUs are high.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 32 Members of Congress sent a bipartisan letter led by Reps. Warren Davidson (OH-8) and Danny Davis (IL-7) requesting your reconsideration of the Upward Bound applications denied based on technical issues, rather than substance. In addition to Rep. Davis, several members of the Congressional Black Caucus have weighed in on this issue with your Department, including Reps. Elijah Cummings, Robin Kelly, Donald Payne, Jr., Cedric Richmond, and Bobby Rush. The letter stemmed from conversations with critical stakeholders in which the letter's signers learned that five percent of Upward Bound applications had been denied due to formatting errors, such as spacing, font, and file format, and many other minor, non-substantive errors. The Illinois and Maine Congressional delegations both sent state-specific bipartisan, bicameral letters expressing the same concerns and requesting similar steps to rectify the situation. The commitment in Congress for this program is evidenced by the broad bipartisan and bicameral support represented in these congressional letters and the additional appropriation provided in the FY2017 omnibus funding bill to cover the costs. We appreciate the discretion you exercised in announcing on May 24<sup>th</sup> that the Department will use the funds and flexibility provided by Congress to allow institutions excluded for non-substantive errors the opportunity to compete based on merit through a second slate. We have not lost sight, however, of the reality that the proposed budget cuts to TRIO funding and the significant loss of FY2017 Upward Bound programs at our HBCUs threaten to close the doors of our most fragile institutions.

We ask that your Department provide us with clarity regarding this disparity and urge you to provide targeted technical assistance to these HBCUs as they make plans to apply for the next Upward Bound project period in 2021. Lastly, the Veterans Upward Bound application was due on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, and we request that your Department closely review and consider applications from HBCUs. As alumni and representatives of many of these HBCUs and the students they serve, this issue is very personal to us. We stand ready to work with your Department when this Administration is willing to adequately provide for our HBCUs, as they have promised.

Sincerely,



Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress (AL-07)



Gwen Moore  
Member of Congress (WI-04)



Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress (IL-07)



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress (VA-03)





Cedric Richmond  
Member of Congress (LA-02)



Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress (FL-20)



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress (CA-13)



John Lewis  
Member of Congress (GA-05)



Val Demings  
Member of Congress (FL-10)



Frederica Wilson  
Member of Congress (FL-24)



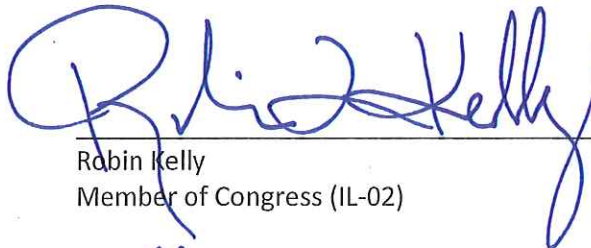
Anthony Brown  
Member of Congress (MD-04)



Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress (NJ-12)



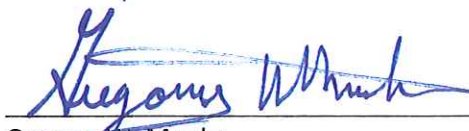
Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress (PA-02)



Robin Kelly  
Member of Congress (IL-02)



Bennie Thompson  
Member of Congress (MS-02)



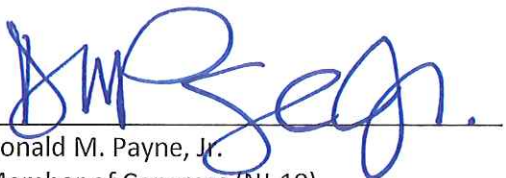
Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress (NY-05)



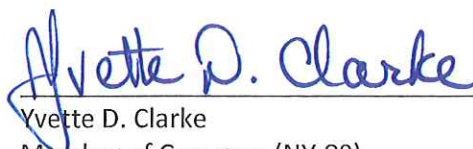
Hank Johnson  
Member of Congress (GA-04)



David Scott  
Member of Congress (GA-13)



Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress (NJ-10)



Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress (NY-09)



Alma Adams  
Member of Congress (NC-12)



Stacey Plaskett  
Member of Congress (VI)



Keith Ellison  
Member of Congress (MN-05)



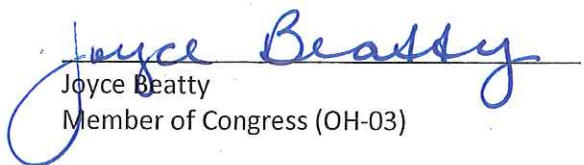
Brenda Lawrence  
Member of Congress (MI-14)



G. K. Butterfield  
Member of Congress (NC-01)



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress (DC)



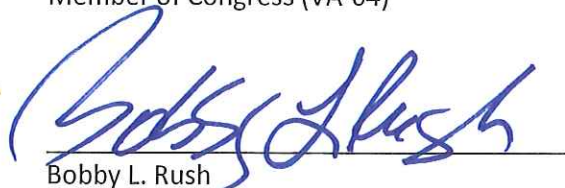
Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress (OH-03)



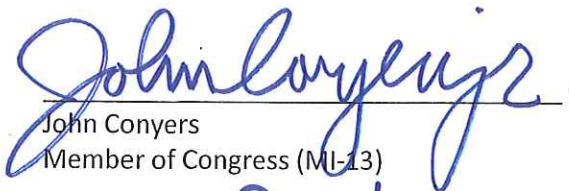
A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress (VA-04)



Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress (DE)



Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress (IL-01)



John Conyers  
Member of Congress (MI-13)



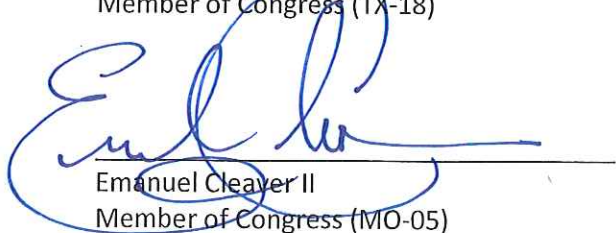
Karen Bass  
Member of Congress (CA-37)



Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress (TX-18)



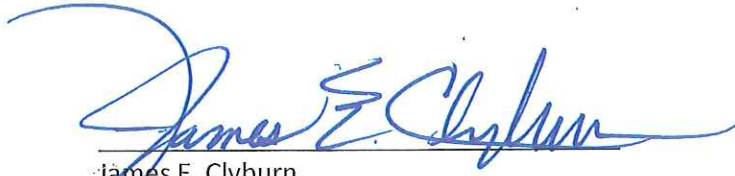
Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress (TX-30)



Emanuel Cleaver II  
Member of Congress (MO-05)



Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress (MO-01)



James E. Clyburn  
Member of Congress (SC-06)



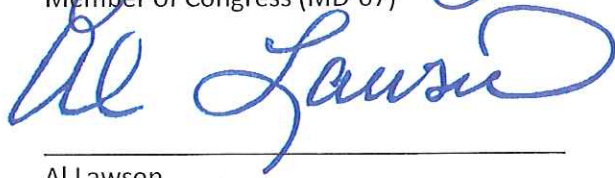
André Carson  
Member of Congress (IN-07)



Elijah E. Cummings  
Member of Congress (MD-07)



Al Green  
Member of Congress (TX-09)



Al Lawson  
Member of Congress (FL-05)