



Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Inc.
Preparing A New Generation Of Leaders

July 30, 2008

Honorable George Miller
Chairman
COMMITTEE on EDUCATION and LABOR
2181 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing on behalf of the 47 historically and predominantly black public colleges and universities that comprise the institutional membership of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF), to convey our support for the Conference Report on the Higher Education Amendments and College Opportunity Act of 2008. Our presidents and chancellors very much appreciate the leadership and support that you and the Committee staff have provided over the past two years in order to bring this important bill to a successful conclusion in the 110th Congress. The unparalleled access that you provided to representatives of the historically black college and university community is very much appreciated. You and your staff have listened to our policy recommendations for new programs and our rationale and suggestions for modifications in the current law, and for that, we express our gratitude.

As you know, the Conference Report on the Higher Education Amendments and College Opportunity Act of 2008 traces its legislative history as far back as 2001, when the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the 107th Congress first began oversight hearings on key programs authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. These hearings on Title IIIB, Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the important role played by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provided a platform for many of TMCF's recommendations. Work continued on reauthorization of the Act throughout the 108th, 109th and the 110th Congress. It is clear that your determination and dedication, and the cooperation and contributions of both Democrats and Republicans on the Committee, have produced a bi-partisan, high quality product that deserves the support of the House and Senate, and the entire higher education community. TMCF is especially indebted to Representative Robert C. "Bobby" Scott of Virginia and Representative Danny K. Davis of Illinois for their hard work and dedication in support of this bill.

Congressmen Scott and Davis have served as our primary advocates and inquisitors with regard to many of the technical amendments and new policy proposals that were included in H.R. 4137, The College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007. During the lengthy debate and legislative process that produced this bill, they have provided wise counsel and good advice, raised serious concerns and questions; and our representatives have done the same. Needless to say, without the frankness and friendship that have largely characterized our discussions, we would not be where we are today.

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I want to highlight and underscore several critical legislative initiatives in the bill that are especially important to TMCF, and to the historically and predominantly black college and universities we represent. First, in Title II, the bill makes important changes to the structure and grant making process that restores the focus and respect of teacher preparation programs on the colleges and universities that prepare most classroom teachers for instruction. TMCF supports the modifications that provide for Teacher Quality Enhancement grants to be awarded to partnerships composed of colleges of teacher education, local education agencies, etc. that are directly involved in teacher preparation and professional development. We are also very pleased that the Conferees retained the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence that will support the strengthening of teacher preparation programs and student recruitment at HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions.

Second, the Conference Report includes several important technical changes in the Title IIIB, Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Strengthening Historically Black Graduate Institutions (HBGIs) – that clarify current law and will improve grant administration at the campus. We are especially pleased that the historic focus of the Section 326 HBGI program was retained, while six new doctoral and first-professional degree programs at Alabama State University, Bowie State University, Delaware State University, Langston University, Prairie View A & M University, and the University of the District of Columbia (David A. Clarke School of Law) have been added. We are equally pleased that the Conferees have created a separate funding stream in Title VII for Masters Degree programs in the physical and natural sciences, mathematics, nursing, and allied health at eighteen (18) HBCUs and five (5) Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). In addition, the Conferees also provided a full authorization in section 318 of Part A for the undergraduate Predominantly Black Institution program originally enacted as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA) of 2007 (P.L. 110-84). TMCF are also pleased that the Conferees included the Patsy T. Mink Fellowship program in the Conference Report.

Third, the Conference Committee bill continues Congress' commitment to improving the Title IV, Student Assistance programs by: (a) authorizing a "year-round" Pell Grant and increasing the Pell Grant maximum award to \$6,000 in FY 2009 and to \$8,000 by FY 2014; (b) simplifying the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA); and (c) strengthening financial aid reform by tightening the regulation of so-called private student loans that are not subsidized or guaranteed by the Federal Government. Be advised, however, that TMCF and the HBCU community remain concerned about the new cohort default rate provisions that, we believe, threaten access for our students and the capacity of our institutions to administer the Federal student loan programs. These changes are counter-productive and threaten institutions that provide access to low-income students, like the HBCUs.

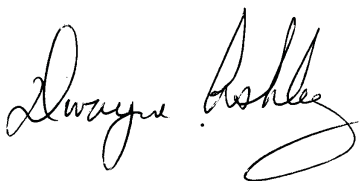
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Finally, we are very pleased that the Conferees have retained the provisions that amend the Stevenson-Wydler Technology Innovation Act of 1980. As you know, these amendments were adopted in the House of Representatives as The Minority –Serving Institutions Digital and Wireless Technology Opportunity Act on September 4, 2007 by a vote of 331-59. Representative Edolphus Towns of New York and Representative Randy Forbes of Virginia have provided bi-partisan leadership in House during the last three Congresses in support of this legislation that will strengthen the technology infrastructure and the use of technology in instruction at the HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions.

Thank you again for your leadership and your support of this important bill. We applaud and appreciate all that you and your staff have done to achieve enactment of this bill, and to support America's historically black colleges and universities. We also want to thank Gabriella Gomez, Julie Radocchia, and Jeff Appel of the Committee staff, as well as Ilana Fisher Brunner and Rashage Green with Mr. Scott and Dr. Jill Hunter-Williams with Mr. Davis for their exceptional contributions to the production of this bill.

Larry V. Green, TMCF Vice President for Development and Government Affairs and William A. "Bud" Blakey, TMCF Washington Counsel, join me in acknowledging the extraordinary bill you and your colleagues have produced, and in applauding you and your staff for your cooperation throughout this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dwayne Ashley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dwayne Ashley
President & CEO

DA:bda
c: Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Hon. Danny K. Davis