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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMONWEALTH of PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Power in the Margins: Funding What's Always Mattered
Tuesday, May 15, 2025 | 10:00 a.m.
Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus

OPENING REMARKS

10:00 a.m. Rep. Regina Young, D-Philadelphia

PANEL ONE

10:05 a.m. Edison Freire, Vice President, School of Adult and Continuing Education
Lincoln University of PA

Dr. Leatra Tate, Founder and Lead Consultant
Centering Equity, LLC

Q & A with Legislators

PANEL TWO

10:35 a.m. Jeffery Williams, Co-founder and Vice President
PGH HBCU Collaborative

Dr. Crystalline Barger, Board President
PGH HBCU Collaborative

Chad Lassiter, Executive Director
Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

Q & A with Legislators

PANEL THREE

11:05 a.m. Omar Rice, Youth Program Manager
Urban League of Philadelphia

Q & A with Legislators

Dr. Leatra B. Tate

Pennsylvania Black Caucus and Policy Committee Hearing

May 15, 2024

Thank you, Chairperson and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Leatra B. Tate, Founder & Lead Consultant with Centering Equity LLC. I appear here today as a concerned citizen, adult-educator, and former school director for Erie Public Schools. I've spent most of my career in northwest Pennsylvania—educating, directing, and advocating—and I'm deeply committed to ensuring our HBCUs and HSIs receive the equitable support they deserve.

As a junior in high school, I distinctly remember preparing for the SATs and college applications and meeting with my guidance counselor for the first and only time. That guidance counselor discouraged me from applying to one of our two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Pennsylvania, Lincoln University. As a first-generation college student, this was a trusted advisor to guide me in making the best educational decisions for my goals, but that experience served every purpose but that. It prevented me from obtaining an educational opportunity that transcends my own lineage and connects me with other Black and brown achievers across this country who have graduated from HBCUs.

That experience underscored the power of messaging and why Pennsylvania's institutions must actively counter any notion of HBCUs or HSIs being "lesser" than any other schools in our Commonwealth. Over the past decade, I have identified my career focus as student support within higher education institutions, specifically between HBCUs and PWIs. I finally landed on Black women's experiences with sexual violence support resources and the narrative research on culturally responsive support received at HBCUs is unmatched and trusted comparatively. My work has repeatedly shown that when institutions ground their support in cultural relevancy, specifically, when HBCUs and HSIs do what they do best, students thrive academically, emotionally, and professionally.

The issue arises when these institutions of higher education can no longer offer full support due to insufficient funding. For example, Pennsylvania's two HBCUs and HSIs have faced decades of lower per-student appropriations compared to other PWIs throughout the state. According to The Century Foundation (2021), HBCUs are chronically underfunded, with the average endowment of public HBCUs being \$7,265 per student and that of private HBCUs being \$24,989 per student, while endowments for other colleges and universities are \$25,390 and \$189,409, respectively. This funding disparity leads to critical services being

unavailable for these institutions, including fewer faculty positions, aging facilities, and limited student support. An estimated \$53 billion is needed to achieve parity. This gap forces HBCUs and their students to incur higher debt burdens than those attending non-HBCU institutions. As Governor Shapiro stated, “every Pennsylvanian deserves the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed.” While Governor Shapiro’s focus on performance-based funding from the state is a step in the right direction, I urge you to go further and incorporate equity weights into the state formula, providing additional funds for high-need populations, such as our MSIs across the state, and mission-critical programs that help strengthen the state’s economy. This approach supports students with the greatest need while also directing funding to schools that have historically lacked sufficient resources.

Another option is to develop an innovative state-supported matching program for private funds donated to HBCUs and HSIs in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In northwest Pennsylvania, we have the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA), which turns gaming revenue into “transformative investment in nonprofits and small businesses, igniting economic and community development in Erie County, Pennsylvania” (ECGRA, 2025). While that may not be a perfect solution for the state, establishing a capital fund for these matching grants is worth exploring from other revenue streams in the Pennsylvania budget. This type of investment would solidify Pennsylvania's position as a trailblazer in spearheading long-overdue, transformative investments in HBCUs and HSIs, sparking philanthropic growth to secure permanent resources for HBCU endowments. It would also serve as state-wide support for changing federal priorities that may impact these pivotal schools in our state.

A shift of this type requires transparency and commitment to outcomes on both the state and institutions’ side, so a standing advisory board within the Council of Higher Education’s Master Plan for Higher Education Advisory Committee should be established to ensure efficacy. This committee should include institutional leaders, students, and subject matter experts to review funding models, monitor progress, and recommend adjustments.

Chairperson and members, systemic change demands strategic, equity-centered investment. By enacting an equity-weighted funding formula, establishing funding for capital improvements to grow HBCU endowments, and ensuring a commitment to sustaining wrap-around supports for students, all undergirded by multi-year commitments and accountability, we can repair historical harms and secure a just, proper, and prosperous future for Pennsylvania’s HBCUs and HSIs.

I urge you to champion these reforms and stand with the institutions that have long been pillars of opportunity for our Commonwealth. Thank you for your time and leadership. I welcome your questions.

Footnotes:

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority. (2025). *ECGRA's Mission*.

<https://www.ecgra.org/mission>

Governor's Press Office. (2024, January 26). *Governor Shapiro delivers new blueprint for higher education, focused on competitiveness and workforce development & grounded in access and affordability*. <https://www.pa.gov/governor/newsroom/2024-press-releases/governor-shapiro-delivers-new-blueprint-for-higher-education--fo.html>

Smith, D. A. (2021). Achieving financial equity and justice for HBCUs. *The Century Foundation*. <https://tcf.org/content/report/achieving-financial-equity-justice-hbcus/?agreed=1>

State Board of Education. (2022). *Pennsylvania Master Plan for Higher Education*. <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/stateboard/current-initiatives/master-plan-for-higher-education.html>

How can data on student outcomes, community impact, and alumni success be used to advocate for sustained state investment in HBCUs?

If our states would really take a look at how successful our HBCUs have been over the centuries since their establishments in the areas of graduation completion of first generation and first-time students, and community impact they would change their view and their tune of funding and support. Our HBCUs were founded to ensure that all of our nation's youth could be educated and families empowered and advanced. They have done their work and much more. HBCUs range from small liberal arts institutions in rural areas to large institutions that are competing on ivy league levels in large metropolitan areas.

The United Negro College Fund Community Impact Report 2024 reported a significant community impact by HBCUs. They have reported that HBCUs generate \$16.5 billion annually in economic impact to their local communities and that they generate 136K jobs for local economies. This is a significant amount of enhancement to our local communities and states. This same report also states that compared to highly selective schools, HBCUs are far more successful at moving students from the bottom 40% of the income distribution to the top 60% of income distribution.

HBCUs are often viewed as the inferior higher education option however, when looking at the data we see the tremendous value that HBCUs have been to our local communities and states. HBCUs have educated and enhanced the skills, and professional development and socioeconomic status of millions of students from low- income households resulting in shifts in their families socioeconomic status. They have also been deemed the most economical option for most students as their tuition rate is not as high as non HBCUs.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the average total cost of attendance for on-campus students at HBCUs ranged from \$27,610-\$31,452. Average tuition and fees were \$12,007 for in-state students and \$15,878 for out-of-state students. Average cost for books and other supplies was \$1,437. Average on-campus room and board costs were \$9,779.

This is noticeably less than our nations non-HBCUs or PWIs. The cost to attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) varies significantly depending on the type of school (private, public) and its location. On average, a four-year PWI can cost anywhere from \$4,500 per year (in-state, public) to \$69,904 or more (private) in tuition alone. Living expenses (room, board, books, supplies) can add another \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year.

HBCUs have produced 24% of STEM degrees earned by African-American students. HBCUs graduate 40% of all black members of Congress and black engineers as well as 50% of black lawyers and 80% of black judges. Some sources suggest that nearly 70% of Black physicians have attended HBCUs. Additionally, HBCUs are the leading institutions in producing Black students who go on to earn Ph.D.s in various fields.

The data speaks for itself- our nations HBCUs have contributed tirelessly to our local and state economies and they deserve the financial support and backing of our states the same as all other state institutions of higher learning.

Testimony of Omar Rice

Youth Programs Manager, Urban League of Philadelphia

PLBC & Policy Committee Hearing: Power in the Margins – May 15, 2025

Good morning Chairpersons and Members of the Committee,

My name is Omar Rice, and I serve as the Youth Programs Manager for the Urban League of Philadelphia. I'm also a proud graduate of Lincoln University and was part of the student advocacy efforts here in Harrisburg in the late 1990s when Lincoln's state-related funding status was at risk.

That experience gave me firsthand insight into how state-level decisions directly impact historically Black institutions and the students they serve. While progress has been made, too often HBCUs are still navigating inequitable funding structures that leave them vulnerable in moments of crisis.

Organizations like the Urban League can help bridge the gap between policy and implementation. We serve as community connectors — helping students access opportunity, supporting families in real time, and ensuring funding decisions actually reach those most impacted. When the FAFSA delays disrupted financial aid last year, we were able to step in with scholarships and support to keep students on track. That kind of on-the-ground response complements — but cannot replace — long-term, sustainable investment in HBCUs.

Empowering these institutions means not just writing policy but resourcing the people and programs that carry it through. That includes community partnerships, youth development pipelines, and culturally responsive outreach — areas where we are uniquely positioned to add value.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership in moving this conversation — and the funding — where it matters most.

I want to talk to you today about something deeply personal to me and that is the untapped power of our HBCU/HSIs right here in Pennsylvania.

You know, I've walked through many different worlds in my career, from nonprofits, education, business, and to government. But no matter where I've been, I keep coming back to one evident truth: communities thrive when their institutions truly reflect and invest in the people they serve.

Our Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions aren't just places where young people get degrees. They are lifelines, family providers, business incubators, and job creators. They are neighborhood anchors. They have a substantive way of educating based on more than curriculum, as they are mission driven and fostering an environment that creates leaders.

What is very disheartening is to sit in community & economic development meetings and not see HBCU and HSI leaders at the table. When innovation funding gets distributed, why are these institutions getting overlooked? When we talk about "anchor institutions" driving regional growth, somehow these powerful community engines don't get the recognition they deserve.

I've seen what's possible when we get this right. I've helped design mentoring programs where students solve real community challenges. I've supported campus business incubators that launch minority-owned companies. I've watched partnerships between schools and local employers transform career pathways for students who were counted out before they even started.

Imagine if we had innovation hubs right on all HBCU/HSI campuses focused on the issues that matter most to surrounding neighborhoods. These issues are detrimental to the success of an individual from healthcare access, food justice, and quality jobs. Picture these campuses as community labs where residents, local businesses, and government officials come together to build solutions that actually work for the people who live there.

I know that many people look at this line of thought and check it off as just idealistic thinking, but it isn't. This is smart economics! When I've helped build these kinds of collaborative models, the return on investment has been undeniable for all involved. The transformation of students, neighborhoods, and for our regional economy is undeniable.

Our HBCU/HSIs already know how to stretch resources and create opportunities against the odds. They've been doing it for generations. What they don't need us to do is teach them how to serve their communities. What they do need us to do is recognize their expertise, fund their vision, and honestly get out of their way.

I carry this passion because I've witnessed the transformational impact when we invest in institutions that have always invested in us. Pennsylvania's economic future gets brighter when we stop treating our academic institutions, especially HBCU/HSIs as educational silos and start embracing them as the economic powerhouses they truly are. None of this is charity work. None of this is about calling in a favor. This is about finally acknowledging the economic engines that have been running in our communities all along; and giving them the fuel they deserve!

I'm standing here today because I believe in data-driven decisions and measurable outcomes. But I'm also testifying because I believe in justice and equity at a time when hard-won progress is under relentless attack, and I refuse to let that work be undone. The fact is that integrating our HBCU/HSIs into Pennsylvania's economic development strategy isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

Thank you.

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PLBC's Power in the Margins: Funding What's Always Mattered Panel Focus Areas: HBCU Funding & Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

Marion T. Key, M.S. - PGH HBCU Collaborative - What role does systemic inequity play in how state funds are currently distributed to HBCUs versus PWIs, and what mechanisms could Pennsylvania implement to ensure a more equitable allocation model?

Hello and thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Commonwealth.

My name is Marion Key. I am a 23-year resident of Pittsburgh, and this topic is one that I carry personally. I am the great-granddaughter of George Lightfoot, Storer College, Harpers Ferry, WV, the granddaughter of Ollie Lightfoot Tolbert, and the daughter of Marion Lightfoot Tolbert Taylor—both proud alumnae of St. Paul's College, Lawrenceville, VA.

My professional experience in this topic is as a development director for the Fund for Advancement of Minorities Through Education (FAME) and as the inaugural development officer for the HBCU Library Alliance. Now, as a retiree, I reflect on my 18 years of experience raising funds, developing strategic plans, and grant writing in support of Black philanthropic efforts in education.

I also attended Delaware State University and Bethune-Cookman University.

You may hear this and think—that's incredible lineage.

But I want to emphasize something important:

Two of the HBCUs I've named—Storer College and St. Paul's College—no longer exist.

They've closed their doors.

In the last 20 years, six HBCUs have closed.

And now, Senate Bill 2726 in Mississippi threatens three more:

Mississippi Valley State, Alcorn State, and Jackson State—projecting closures by June 2028.

Add to that, St. Augustine’s University in Raleigh, NC—now without accreditation due to IRS tax liens and financial distress.

These are not just institutions. They are legacies, lifelines, and ladders of opportunity.

For Hispanic-Serving Institutions, underfunding remains a barrier. There are no 4-year public or private institutions in Pennsylvania, all 3 HSIs are community colleges and none of the three are located in Philadelphia despite having one of the largest Hispanic populations in the state.

Pennsylvania lags behind other states in HSIs:

California (171 HSIs), Texas (112), New York (39), Illinois (39), and Puerto Rico (56) and equity gaps in state funding and lack of institutional designation suggest untapped opportunity for growth and support of Hispanic students.

[Main Message – 4 to 5 minutes]

Systemic inequity has played a deep and enduring role in how state funds are distributed to HBCUs and HSIs versus Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

This is not just about budget choices—
...it’s about decades of structural racism, discriminatory policies, and a historic undervaluing of institutions that primarily serve Black and brown students.

Let’s take Pennsylvania.

Cheyney University, the nation’s oldest HBCU, has endured chronic underinvestment, infrastructure decline, and budget constraints, even while maintaining its powerful historic mission.

By contrast, similarly sized PWIs in our state have received:

- More robust **state appropriations**
- Larger **endowments**
- Greater access to **capital investment** and **operational support**

This is not accidental.

It reflects systemic priorities that have long ignored HBCUs' contributions while expecting them to do more with less.

The effects of this inequity are wide-reaching:

- Diminished capacity to offer competitive programs
- Limited student support and financial aid
- Faculty recruitment and retention struggles
- And the ongoing cycle of racial and economic disparity in higher education access

So, what can Pennsylvania do?

We need bold, intentional action.

Here are five mechanisms to create an equitable funding model:

1. Equity-Based Funding Formula

Incorporate a funding weight that reflects historical underfunding, student demographics, and mission—not just enrollment.

2. Targeted Capital Investment

Create a dedicated infrastructure fund for HBCUs to modernize facilities and address decades of deferred maintenance.

3. Accountability & Transparency

Require annual reporting of funding allocations by race, institution type, and program outcomes—ensuring we track equity in real terms.

4. Public-Private Partnerships

Incentivize companies, foundations, and community partners to co-invest in HBCU innovation and workforce initiatives.

5. Legislative Oversight & Advocacy

Form a bipartisan HBCU Legislative Caucus to monitor funding equity and elevate institutional needs across policy decisions.

[Closing – 1 to 1.5 minutes]

The combination of financial stress, enrollment decline, and policy threats puts HBCUs at a crossroads.

But we can rewrite this story. Equitable investment in HBCUs is not charity.

It is justice. It is economic strategy. It is educational excellence.

These institutions have consistently done more with less—

Now, it's time the Commonwealth equips them to do more with more.

Thank you.