

**Testimony Provided to the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate**

Dr. Reynold Verret

President

Xavier University of Louisiana

June 17, 2021

Biography

Dr. C. Reynold Verret is the 6th President of Xavier University of Louisiana. Prior to his 2015 investiture as President, Dr. Verret served as provost and chief academic officer for Savannah State University. As provost, he worked closely with the President and members of her Cabinet to achieve the university vision and strategic goals and provided leadership to ensure that the university's priorities were addressed and implemented. He led the university's initiatives to build enrollment, enhance the quality and diversity of academic programs, and to create cooperative relationships with neighboring institutions and with international partners. He developed the faculty and contributed to the university's advancement and development efforts.

Dr. Verret has served also as provost at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania and as Dean of the Misher College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. At these institutions, he led the revisions of general education curricula, oversaw accreditations, developed international programs, established collaborative agreements with neighboring institutions at the K-12 and higher education levels, instituted new state-approved academic programs, promoted interdisciplinary efforts between the humanities and sciences, and planned new facilities. Dr. Verret also served on faculty at Tulane University and also at Clark Atlanta University, where he was chair of the department of chemistry for many years.

As a scientist, Dr. Verret's research interests have included the cytotoxicity of immune cells, biosensors and biomarkers. He has published in the fields of biological chemistry and immunology. At the University of the Sciences, he led a faculty effort establishing a knowledge network on social exclusion in support of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health within the World Health Organization.

Throughout, Dr. Verret works to enhance student achievement and progression to degree. He has contributed to increasing the number of US students pursuing degrees in STEM disciplines and continuing to advanced study. This has included initiatives to mitigate the shortage of qualified science and math teachers in K-12.

He has served on many professional organizations and advisory bodies, including those of the National Institutes of Health, the Board of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, and the Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition. He has received awards and fellowships for teaching and scholarship.

Dr. Verret received his undergraduate degree cum laude in biochemistry from Columbia University and the Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. To these, were added postdoctoral experiences as fellow at the

Howard Hughes Institute for Immunology at Yale and the Center for Cancer Research at MIT.

Executive Summary

Chairman Patty Murray, Ranking Member Richard Burr, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Dr. C. Reynold Verret, and I serve as the 6th President of Xavier University of Louisiana (Xavier). Xavier was founded by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. My institution is Catholic and considered a historically black college and university (HBCU).

The ultimate purpose of Xavier is to contribute to the promotion of a more just and humane society by preparing its students to assume roles of leadership and service in a global society. This preparation takes place in a diverse learning and teaching environment that incorporates all relevant educational means, including research and community service.

I was asked to testify before the committee today on how Xavier, as an HBCU, has employed and utilized the federal relief funds passed by Congress as a result of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. As you know, HBCUs were created as early as 1837 to provide African Americans access to higher education. Noted for their contributions in educating “black, low-income and educationally disadvantaged Americans,” the 101 HBCUs today constitute the class of institutions that satisfy the statutory definition of the term “HBCU” as defined in the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA).

On January 23, 2020, I called together a daylong scenario planning session consisting of my cabinet and key administrators within academic and student affairs, facilities, and marketing and communications. This table-top planning group met on January 29th to respond to this question: “if this new airborne virus that had recently migrated from China to other Southeast Asian countries were to reach our shore such that major public health measures are required and students sent home, how could we continue high quality education and protect all concerned?”. Furthermore, the group was to assess what was required to assure our readiness, identify what was in place and what was lacking.

As a result of this vigilance, Xavier determined to begin remote instruction on March 16, 2020, allowing students the option to shelter in place. One week later, Xavier sent all students and non-essential employees home. Instruction continued by online modalities for the duration of the Spring semester.

Once the campus was depopulated, I established a planning task force of academic, student affairs, and health personnel to plan for the longer term, and determine how we could offer instruction while maintaining the well-being of students, faculty and staff. If we were to return in person, how could we assure greater safety on campus, than in our surroundings or the home localities of our students?

As a result of their deliberation, the taskforce recommended a plan strategy with detailed timeline for reopening as is further articulated in my written testimony, and due to the uncertainties of the evolving pandemic, the team offered three scenarios: face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020, Xavier all online courses in Fall 2020, and a hybrid of both online courses and face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020.

The Administration established to move to mixed modality instruction and service delivery for the Fall 2020 semester. The majority of instruction took place in person with a significant component via remote or hybrid means, which allowed students to choose their preferred mode of instruction. The university redoubled its effort for academic and emotional support, attending to students physically present and those who remained at home.

The university contracted hotel space nearby to transition all residences to single occupancy. Forty-four percent of the student body (1390 students) resided on campus. Masking and distancing would be required of all persons on campus. Xavier was fortunate in that the pandemic did not result in layoffs; however hiring and spending freezes were imposed.

Situated in Orleans Parish, Xavier pays close attention to the current developments in the city, surrounding parishes, and the State of Louisiana. As of March 11, 2020, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency; ordered bars to close and restaurants to limit capacity; ordered grocery stores and pharmacies to reserve the first hour of each day for seniors; and canceled events for the next 30 days. In Orleans Parish, with a population of approximately 390,849, the number of COVID-19 cases began spiking as of late March 2020. On February 25, 2020, Mardi Gras—a uniquely New Orleans festivity—took place. On April 2nd, there were 745 new cases of COVID-19 in our community. Further, I began to note anecdotally what we would belatedly have empirical evidence to prove: the health disparities which have for centuries existed and ravished African American communities were not only being further exposed but rather exacerbated. The working-class African Americans, which make our city hum with excitement and vigor, were the most impacted and bore the burden of disease.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Congress, including those of this committee, for passing last Congress' H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act; H.R. 133, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020; and this Congress' H.R. 1319, the American Recovery Act. Your time, energy, and effort does not go unnoticed, and I also want to thank President Trump for signing the first two into law, and then President Biden whose leadership was the catalyst for the ARP.

Because of the CARES Act, Xavier has access to a total of \$37.9 million in direct allocations from Section 18004(a)(1) and 18004(a)(2) of the bill. While I am thankful for this, I would be remiss if I did not share with you all that Xavier has been bracing for revenue losses that would impact our ability to operate. Also, our students are enduring difficult economic times that presents unique challenges, most especially for students of color.

With this said, let to firmly thank Congress, specifically, for providing an additional allocations of \$1.054 billion, \$1.7 billion, and \$2.98 billion in funding for HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Additionally, I would like to thank Congress for targeted debt relief for institutions in the HBCU Capital Finance Program in the 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act. Many HBCUs benefitted, and I must say that Xavier benefitted from that relief to a minimal effect, because the relief was predicated on funding that was already obligated at the time the bill was signed into law. I am also grateful for funding which benefitted our student population directly. The majority of my students are Black Americans and Black Americans are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. If the majority of my students are disproportionately impacted, then my institution is disproportionately impacted as compared with other colleges and universities. All of us at Xavier, including faculty, staff, and students, needed additional resources to survive this pandemic and ensure that we are able to successfully survive this pandemic.

For more information and details regarding my remarks, I ask that you read my written testimony submitted for your review.

Thank you.

Full Testimony

Introduction

Chairman Patty Murray, Ranking Member Richard Burr, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is C. Reynold Verret, and I serve as the 6th President of Xavier University of Louisiana (Xavier). Xavier was founded by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. My institution is Catholic and a historically black college and university (HBCU).

The ultimate purpose of Xavier is to contribute to the promotion of a more just and humane society by preparing its students to assume roles of leadership and service in a global society. This preparation takes place in diverse learning and teaching environments that incorporate all relevant educational means, including research and community service.

I was asked to testify before the committee today on how Xavier, as an HBCU, has employed and utilized the federal relief funds passed by Congress as a result of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. As you know, HBCUs were created as early as 1837 to provide African Americans access to higher education. Noted for their contributions in educating “black, low-income and educationally disadvantaged Americans,” the 101 HBCUs today constitute the class of institutions that satisfy the statutory definition of the term “HBCU” as defined in the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA).

Under my leadership, Xavier continues to be the #1 feeder school in the country in producing Black doctors, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Xavier educates a major portion of Black students heading to medical school, with Howard University as our nearest competitor, and dwarfs efforts of the Ivy League and large state, research intensive universities. From 2013 to 2018, 147 Xavier African-American graduates completed medical school. In the past four years, again under my leadership there has been an almost 21% increase in first-year students and retention grew by 3%. Xavier is indeed exemplary, but it is also an example of what HBCUs can and have been doing. Structurally, we educate a much larger fraction of African-American talent. We are producing talent that the nation needs.

HBCU History and Statistics

Before I share how Xavier is preparing to reopen in the Fall semester and the unique challenges caused by the virus named “SARS-CoV-2” causing a disease named

“coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19),¹ it is imperative that we all understand the history of HBCUs to better understand how COVID-19 impacts these institutions exponentially.

HBCUs were created as early as 1837 to provide African Americans access to higher education. Noted for their contributions in educating black, low-income, and educationally disadvantaged Americans, the 101 accredited HBCUs today constitute the class of institutions that satisfy the statutory definition of the term “HBCU” as defined in the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA).²

HBCUs disproportionately enroll low-income, first-generation and academically underprepared college students—precisely the students that the country most needs to obtain college degrees. In 2018:

- Nearly 300,000 students attended HBCUs³;
- More than 75 percent of HBCU students were African Americans; and
- Over 60 percent of undergraduate students at HBCUs received federal Pell Grants, and over 60 percent of these students received federal loans.⁴

HBCUs comprised 3 percent of all two- and four-year non-profit colleges and universities, yet they:

- Enroll 10 percent of African American undergraduates;
- Produce 17 percent of all African American college graduates with bachelor’s degrees; and
- Graduate 24 percent of African Americans with bachelor’s degrees in STEM fields.⁵

¹ U.S. Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19)*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>

² The definition of an HBCU can be found in Section 322(2) of the HEA.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Digest of education statistics 2019* [Table 313.20]. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_313.20.asp

⁴ UNCF Public Policy and Government Affairs calculations using 2018 data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Data shows that out of 257,451 total undergraduate students at HBCUs, 159,101 students were receiving Pell Grants and 162,179 students were receiving federal loans.

⁵ UNCF Patterson calculations using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

A 2015 Gallup survey confirms that HBCUs are providing African American students with a better college experience than African American students at other colleges and universities.

- 55 percent of African American HBCU graduates say their college prepared them well for post-college life versus 29 percent for African American graduates of other institutions.⁶

HBCUs attained these results at an affordable price for students—that is, the cost of attendance at HBCUs is about 30 percent lower, on average, than other colleges—despite limited operating budgets and endowments that are roughly half the typical size of other four-year public and private non-profit colleges and universities.

Since our founding, HBCUs have been, and continue to be, under-resourced institutions. An issue brief produced by ACE (American Council on Education) and UNCF (United Negro College Fund, Inc.) revealed the following:

- Public HBCUs rely more heavily on federal, state, and local funding in comparison with their non-HBCU counterparts (54 percent of overall revenue vs 38 percent);
- Private HBCUs depend somewhat more on tuition dollars than their non-HBCUs counterparts (45 percent compared with 37 percent);
- Private gifts, grants, and contracts constitute a smaller portion of overall revenue at private HBCUs compared to their non-HBCU counterparts (17 percent vs 25 percent);
- Public and Private HBCUs experienced the largest declines in federal funding per full-time equivalent student between 2003-2015; and
- In both the public and private sectors, HBCU endowments lag behind those of non-HBCUs by at least 70 percent.⁷

Despite being under-resourced institutions, HBCUs have a large economic impact that often goes unnoticed by most. In 2017, UNCF released a report detailing the economic impact of HBCUs. The report revealed that in 2014, the impact of HBCUs on their regional economies included:

⁶ Gallup, Inc. (2015). *Gallup-USA funds minority college graduates report*. Retrieved from UNCF Website: https://www.uncf.org/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/USA_Funds_Minority_Report_GALLUP-2.pdf

⁷ Williams, K.L. & Davis, B.L. (2019). *Public and private investments and divestments in historically black colleges and universities*. Retrieved from American Council on Education Website: <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Public-and-Private-Investments-and-Divestments-in-HBCUs.aspx>

- \$10.3 billion in initial spending, which includes spending by the institution for personnel services, spending by the institution for operating expenses, and spending by students;
- An employment impact of 134,090 jobs, which approximately 43 percent were on-campus jobs and 57 percent were off-campus jobs;
- \$10.1 billion in terms of gross regional product, which is a measure of the value of production of all industries;
- A work-life earnings of \$130 billion for the Class of 2014, which is 56 percent more than they could expect to earn without their 2014 certificates or degrees; and
- A total economic impact of \$14.8 billion.⁸

In regard to Xavier University of Louisiana specifically, my institution had the following economic impact on its regional economy according to the UNCF report:

- \$200,000,000 in annual economic impact;
- 1,715 jobs supported annually; and
- \$1.7 billion in lifetime earnings for one graduating class.
- \$95 million in labor income impact.⁹

In addition to the positive impact HBCUs make on the overall economy, HBCUs also have a strong impact academically when observed at the state and local level. An upcoming report to be released by UNCF shows that:

- HBCUs comprised 8.5 percent of the four-year institutions across the 21 states and territories in the analysis;

⁸ Humphreys, J.M. (2017). *HBCUs make America strong: The positive economic impact of historically black colleges and universities*. Retrieved from UNCF Website: <https://www.uncf.org/programs/hbcu-impact>

⁹ (1) Total initial spending accruing to the institution's regional economy is the combination of three types of spending: spending by the institution for personnel services (wages, salaries, and benefits), spending by the institution for operating expenses, and spending by that institution's students. (2) The output impact was calculated for each category of initial spending, based on the impacts of the first round of spending and the re-spending of these amounts—the multiplier effect. (3) Value-added (gross regional product) impacts exclude expenditures related to foreign and domestic trade, thus providing a much more accurate measure of the actual economic benefits flowing to businesses and households in a region than the more inclusive output impacts. (4) The labor income received by residents of the cities that host HBCUs represents 72 percent of the value-added impact. (5) For the employment impact, on average, for each job created on campus there were 1.3 off-campus jobs that existed because of spending related to the HBCU. For all HBCUs combined, 13 jobs were generated for each million dollars of initial spending in 2014.

- Across the 21 states and territories in the analysis, HBCUs enrolled, on average, 24 percent of all black undergraduates pursuing a bachelor's degree in a college or university in 2016;
- Across the 21 states and territories in the analysis, on average, 26 percent of all black bachelor's degree recipients graduated from an HBCU in 2016; and
- In North Carolina, HBCUs are 16 percent of the four-year institutions, but enroll 45 percent of all black undergraduates and award 43 percent of all black bachelor's degrees in the state.¹⁰

Xavier's Plans for Possible Pandemic

On January 23, 2020, as we received reports of the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 from China to neighboring countries, I called for the first meeting of my executive team with associated support staff to prepare for possible pandemic. The scenario-planning team met for a daylong tabletop exercise, the team responded to the question: if the virus arrived on our shore and necessary public health measures were implemented, including lockdowns and sending home students and non-essential personnel, how would Xavier sustain high quality education, continue serving its students, and protect all concerned. Their task was to assess forthrightly our preparedness, our capabilities and deficits. In doing so, we identified the immediate need to reinforce in all faculty an already burgeoning capacity to teach well online. We considered our ability to address physical and emotional needs of students and personnel, and to serve those who might become ill.

On the morning of Saturday, March 7, 2020, as I returned to Xavier from a UNCF meeting, Xavier continued its moment-to-moment response to the novel coronavirus that would be declared a pandemic in a precious few short days.. On March 13, 2020, Xavier implemented its decision to move to remote instruction, initially allowing students the option to shelter in place. One week later, Xavier sent all students and non-essential employees home. One concern at the time is that travel might be restricted, and students might lose the possibility of returning home.

Throughout this long emergency, my fellow college and university presidents, locally in the New Orleans region and among sister HBCUs, exchanged ideas and worked collectively for the safety of our students and personnel and to sustain our educational missions. Many Zoom meetings were spent exchanging thoughts and considering best approaches.

Facing the COVID-19 Storm: Initial Responses

¹⁰ Saunders, K. & Nagle, B.T. (2018). *HBCUs punching above their weight: A state-level analysis of historically black college and university enrollment and graduation*. Washington, DC: UNCF Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute

I subsequently established a planning team derived from academic and student affairs, our health personnel, and specialists from our School of Pharmacy and our Public Health faculty. This group was charged to plan for the longer term, to plan for the return in whatever fashion and determine how we could offer instruction while maintaining the well-being of students, faculty and staff. I joined at times in their engaged discussions. One operant question that they were asked to test was how we could assure greater safety on campus, than in our surroundings or the home localities of our students, if we allowed students, faculty, and staff to return.

It is because they were able to propose a plan that satisfied this condition of greater safety that we could ethically embark on a return in-person for Fall 2020. The taskforce recommended a plan with detailed timeline and behavioral requirements for repopulating campus, with mixed modalities of instruction. Due to the uncertainties of the evolving pandemic, the team offered three scenarios: face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020, Xavier all online courses in Fall 2020, and a hybrid of both online courses and face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020.

The plan relied on masking, which the science showed to reliably and profoundly reduce transmissibility of the virus. It required social distancing, reducing occupancy of housing facilities to single occupancy per room. It required surveillance testing and decision points that might require a return to fully remote instruction. It called for redoubling efforts for academic and emotional support, attending to students physically present and those who remained at home. The team also proposed guidance that students would shelter in place in the event of a surge. They should not be sent home to spread illness elsewhere. The plan recognize the urgency of the situation and the necessity to persevere.

The university contracted space in a nearby hotel at a cost of several million dollars per semester so as to transition all residences to single occupancy. Forty-four percent of the student body (1390 students) resided on campus. Masking and distancing would be required of all persons on campus.

The leadership team also implemented deep cleaning of all facilities with an antimicrobial agent. Finally, while Xavier never closed, we met and exceeded all federal, state, and local orders, including the closing of the campus and allowing access only to essential employees and a few remaining residential students. Initially, approximately 150 students remained on campus during their spring break. As the second week of spring break expired, in response to the extension of the federal social distancing guideline through April 30th, Xavier decided to close residence halls on Friday, March 26th, and required all students to vacate the premises, except for

international students, and those students deemed food and housing insecure. Each of the 1390 residential students' accounts was credited an average of \$1800.00 in housing refunds, for a total of \$2.4 million. Forty-four (44) percent of the student body resided on campus prior to the pandemic closure. Fortunately, Xavier did not have to lay off any employees due to the pandemic, but hiring and spending freezes were imposed. Superlative education continued and 571 students graduated on May 8, 2021. These graduates are our gift to the world.

Facing the Storm: Suppressing Transmission

The measure of success experienced at Xavier in sustaining education and in suppressing transmission of the virus in our campus community is due largely the charism of “service to other” that infuses this community of learners. Students know that their learning will find its meaning when applied to service of others, whether as teachers, physicians, artists or scientists. As Xavier deployed behavioral measures, e.g. masking, social distancing, wiping one’s desk when leaving it, the Xavierites responded so as to endanger fellow students, faculty or staff. The Xavier community followed these measures, resulting in no greater than 1.6% seropositivity on campus throughout the pandemic. Responding to the teaching of Leviticus 19:34 and Mark 12:31, this community lived its calling to love one’s neighbor at all times. In adhering to care of other, there was care for all.

Facing the Storm: Faculty and Staff Innovative and Flexible.

COVID-19 has disrupted learning and life at Xavier, but it has not, and will not, defeat us. Like the eagle, Xavier faced the storm winds and soared above COVID-19 to complete the spring 2020 and 2020 – 2021 academic years remotely and hybrid, respectively, with faculty and students teaching and learning from their homes. We learned that, yes, we can deliver distance education, and, yes, to my staff’s great delight, I can even complete a full Zoom meeting in 30 minutes. This storm has given us a new perspective and language for our employees and while there was never any doubt, we affirm anew that the faculty of our institution are essential. In addition, the residential staff, security officers, chefs, cooks, servers, the Team Clean custodial workers, and the controller’s staff are essential as well.

Today, I celebrate Xavier faculty for their flexibility; the essential staff who braved the virus to come to campus daily; those who worked remotely and learned how to conduct Zoom classes and meetings; our precious students; and everyone who faced the storm and soared above with vigilance, patience, and prayer. The entire Xavier family responded well to the challenge to recruit, retain, and remove barriers for students.

Xavier's administrative staff, directors, chaplains, and faculty all joined together to email, text, and communicate with new or prospective students. Faculty and staff have committed to removing the barriers to graduation and registration, and COVID-19 has taught us that some of the things we thought were important and necessary are neither important, necessary, or really needed.

Facing the Storm: Our City and Our State.

Situated less than one mile from downtown New Orleans, we pay close attention to developments in our city, surrounding parishes, and the State of Louisiana. As of March 26, 2020, the state of Louisiana declared a state of emergency; ordered bars to close and restaurants to limit capacity; ordered grocery stores and pharmacies to reserve the first hour of each day for seniors; and canceled events for the next 30 days. In New Orleans, a majority African American city with a population of 390,849, the number of COVID-19 cases began spiking in late March 2020. On February 25, 2020, Mardi Gras—a uniquely New Orleans festivity—took place. On April 2nd, there were 745 new cases of COVID-19 in our community on that one day alone. Health disparities which have for centuries afflicted African American communities were noticeably exacerbated in pandemic, especially in the early months of the emergency. Frontline workers, disproportionately people of color experienced greater exposure. Working class African Americans, who make our city hum with excitement and hope, bore a greater disease burden.

With this being said, Xavier is challenged to serve, sharing expertise with city and community, with many Xavierites serving on city and State taskforces and committees. The university was most fortunate to have UNCF and the 37 member institutions as thought partners. Webinars and convenings allowed for collective thought and reflection. The university also owed a debt of gratitude to ThermoFisher and the Gates Foundation for enabling the establishment of a high thru-put testing laboratory on campus. This facility afforded surveillance testing for our campus and other HBCUs in our region.

My institution continues to rely heavily on the following sources in our evolving response.

- CDC,
- UNCF,
- American College Health Association Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era,
- Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU),
- Louisiana Board of Regents,

- Louisiana Department of Health,
- Louisiana Economic Recovery Group (ERG),
- City of Public Health Taskforce
- City of New Orleans Health Department, and
- The city, parish, state and federal guidance and orders.
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU),
- National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Core Principles of Resocialization of Collegiate Sport

Xavier was able to quickly establish a COVID-19 Team with a strategy team to lead. The Xavier crisis team is made up of the head of student health, experts from Public Health and Pharmacy, from Student Affairs, with participation of the President as needed. This team is charged with offering overall leadership and guidance, including tracking seropositivity and recommending responses and communication to the community, and also coordinating the weekly COVID-19 Team Meeting. As president, my role is to keep the team focused on valid science in its assessment of the situation and its recommendations to maintain safety.

Due to the fluid developments of COVID-19 pandemic, Xavier prepared for three scenarios: face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020, all online courses in Fall 2020, and hybrid of online courses and face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020.

When Xavier students returned for face-to-face instruction in Fall 2020, it was during a more aggressive COVID-19 season. The institution's response mirrored the response of the Spring 2020 semester and consisted of the following:

- Protocols established across the campus, particularly the academic and student affairs COVID-19 protections, to keep students safe and healthy on campus prior to their departure;
- Faculty prior experience in delivering and moving instruction from face-to-face to online;
- Strict adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols for students, faculty, staff, and visitors to include washing their hands, wearing their masks, social distancing, and self-checking for COVID-19 symptoms;
- Surveillance testing for COVID-19 infection.
- COVID-19 restrictions and recommendations by local, state, and federal entities;
- Frequent and routine virtual recruiting, admissions, financial, orientation, and athletic presentations;

- The re-recruitment of majors by departmental leaders; and
- Preparations to see a decrease in overall enrollment and revenue.

While small and independent, Xavier primed itself to deliver responsive and creative programmatic and curricular solutions. The institution used federal support to source digital devices, platforms, texts, course material, and office applications to support Xavier. Xavier implemented BrightSpace Virtual Platform, eliminating face-to-face instruction and moving all classes to a remote format for over a semester before carefully returning to campus. However, that did pose its own unique set of challenges for Xavier:

- About 55% of Xavier students receive Pell grants. Thus, more than half of our students do not have the funds, equipment, or Internet access to receive instruction remotely;
- Many students arrive on campus having endured food and housing insecurities at home. For some, the University is the most safe and secure place; and
- The College had to rapidly deploy, at cost, online resources to support secure virtual testing administration or the delivery of science lab instruction.

Use of Funds

The following outlines how Xavier has used its CARES, CRRSAA, and ARP allocations to date.

- HEERF I & HEERF II Student Aid – The University was awarded a total of \$3.2 million in student aid and to date has disbursed \$2.9 million emergency student aid grants as follows:
 - HEERF I – Emergency student aid grants - \$1.4 million
 - HEERF II – Emergency Aid Grants - \$1.5 million
- HEERF I Institutional Aid – The University was awarded \$1.6 million and has expended \$1.3 million on the following:
 - Distance learning training for faculty
 - Computers for students, faculty and staff for loaner program

- IT software purchases necessary due to COVID -19.
- HEERF II Institutional Aid – University was awarded \$3.9 million to date we have not expended any of these funds.
- CARES Act Title III - The University received an award of \$7.0 million and expended \$5.8 million the funds as follows:
 - \$1.8 million in need based scholarships to students.
 - \$2.4 million reimbursement of housing refunds paid to students due to campus closure in March 2020.
 - \$1.6 million reimbursement for payments made to the Hilton for off-site housing due to a need for additional housing to reduce density (single occupancy housing).
- CARES Act Title III (Second Allocation) – The total award is \$12.4 million of which the University has expended \$5.1 million reimbursement for payments made to the Hilton for off-site housing due to a need for additional housing to reduce density (single occupancy housing). Please note the University paid a total of \$6.7 million to the Hilton.
- American Rescue Plan ARP – Total award is \$9.6 million (\$4.8 million student aid and \$4.8 million Institutional aid), the University has not expended any of these funds to date.

Facing the Storm: Requests for Consideration

I would be remiss if I did not thank Congress and those of this committee for passing H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Your time, energy, and effort does not go unnoticed, and I also want to thank the President for signing this bill into law. Because of the CARES Act, Xavier to a total of \$3.79 million in direct allocations from Section 18004(a)(1) and 18004(a)(2) of the bill. Of this total, we have received the allocation for the emergency grant aid for students and the allocation for the institutions in Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act equaling \$2.9 million. My institution used the institutional funds to reimburse ourselves for

COVID-19 related expenses and disseminated the emergency grant aid to students. Xavier established two dispersal tactics:

HEERF I:

- Increased financial aid packages of new and continuing students (\$3 million)
- Provided \$1.8 million in emergency grants to over 1100 students; an application process was used to address breadth and depth of individual student needs

HEERF II:

- Provided \$1.8 million in additional emergency grants to continuing students, prioritizing students with highest need (based on federal financial aid guidelines)

Xavier, with her 756 full-time equivalent employees, was ineligible for the Small Business Administration (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program loan because of the university's size. We are also currently participating in the HBCU Capital Financing program deferment of principal and interest payments during this emergency. We received an HBCU Capital Financing loan in 2020 of \$100,000,000. This deferment allows us to direct these payments towards sustaining the needed and necessary operations of our campus.

Please know, Xavier reflects the diversity of private, nonprofit higher education in the United States. With over 5 million students attending 1,700 independent colleges and universities in all 50 states, and more than 1 million employees, the private sector of American higher education has a dramatic impact on our nation's larger public interests. On behalf of UNCF-member institutions, HBCUs, and small nonprofit colleges, I ask that you do the following:

On behalf of UNCF-member institutions, HBCUs, and small nonprofit colleges, I ask that you do the following:

1. Forgive balance of HBCU Capital Finance Program debt for remaining HBCUs: The long-term impact of the federal government providing permanent relief the HBCU Capital Finance institutions in December 2020 will be felt for generations. Xavier knows this impact having survived the impact Hurricane Katrina. However, the provisions of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 state that only obligated funds borrowed from the Department of Education's program were eligible for relief. When Xavier, undertaking an opportunity to finally tackle a backlog of deferred maintenance, borrowed \$100,000,000 from the HBCU Capital Finance Program, the subsequent permanent relief proved to have little to no

institutional impact. As an issue of fairness for similarly situated institutions, the remaining (and existing) HBCU Capital Finance Program loans should also undergo permanent relief. We at Xavier understand that this relief should not be routine; however, there are numerous measures in the 117th Congress which include this permanent relief, including the Institutional Grants for New Infrastructure, Technology, and Education for (IGNITE) HBCU Excellence Act.

2. Double Pell Grants: As much as institutions which have been historically underfunded—such as HBCUs—so have the students that they serve. As aforementioned, 70% of Xavier students are Pell Grant eligible. That means those students come from low-to-moderate income backgrounds. Yet, they persist. Unfortunately, too many of them take out loans which saddle them with a financial burden so heavy that they struggle to repay for much of their adult life despite a strong career. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant, and restoring the purchasing power of the program, allows for our students who need the most help to have it at their disposal. To me and my colleagues everywhere in academia, this is a “no-brainer.” I encourage this committee, the committee of jurisdiction, to do all it can in this very Congress to double the Pell Grant.

3. Support Biden-Harris plans: Whether it is the budget put forward by President Biden for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, the Jobs and Infrastructure plan, or the American Families plan, HBCUs are prominently supported. Sure this elevates institutions like Xavier in the public discourse, but it also proves that my institution and all of them like it are worthy of investment not just because they are HBCUs or a historic lack of investment. Instead, we are worthy of transformative infusions by the federal government because of our product: graduates who exactly the ones the country needs to pursue its goals and objectives. Sure Xavier graduates provide diversity, but they also provide ingenuity, a hard-working spirit, and a level of intelligence and know-how that proves the old adage that it is not where you start but instead where you finish.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Xavier is an institution that not only has a history of contributing to society, but is an institution that also provides transformative education for our students, especially our students who are low-income and first generation. In promoting social mobility of students and their achievement, Xavier not only benefits the individual, but families, communities, cities and states. Social impact is indeed great.

It is an honor to be asked to present this testimony, and I commend you for your service and for addressing these important issues.

Thank you.