

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

April 28, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

Thank you for your leadership and focus on addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on Americans. We are writing in support of the request by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the Academy) and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) for \$310 million to address racial disparities in nutrition and health care access.

We are struck by the data indicating pronounced racial and ethnicity disparities for COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. African Americans are 13 percent of the U.S. population but account for a high percent of hospitalizations for COVID-19. In addition to myriad socioeconomic factors, we believe that a key contributor to the racial and ethnic disparities seen in COVID-19 deaths is a combination of reduced access to health care, healthful foods and safe opportunities to be active. Poor nutrition contributes to the development of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure and also mediates the inflammatory and immune response that increases the likelihood of poor COVID-19 outcomes.

To address these chronic disease health disparities now and to prevent recurring disparities, the Academy and NAFEO requests \$310 million for the Department of Education, of which \$300 million would be set aside for grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Primarily Black Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Institutions to strengthen and grow their allied health education programs, including nutrition and dietetics. The remaining \$10 million would be set aside for grants for organizations or institutions to conduct national outreach initiatives to encourage people of color from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to pursue careers in nutrition and dietetics and to provide technical assistance to grantees to recruit and mentor students that enroll in their newly opened nutrition and dietetics programs. We know that cultural competency and relatability is often the touchstone of success for engaging patients and clients and motivating them to change dietary patterns.

The Institute of Medicine report *Unequal Treatment Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care* recommended increasing the proportion of health professionals from

underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups. Currently, African Americans account for only two percent of registered dietitian nutritionists and Hispanics only three percent. This initiative will improve access to culturally competent nutrition counseling in communities of color by increasing the number of minority registered dietitian nutritionists.

HBCUs, TCUs and Minority-Serving Institutions are particularly well-suited to address these disparities. Their medical schools, schools of public health and other schools and departments are already leaders in achieving health equity in America. These institutions educate more than six million students and graduate nearly one third of all postsecondary degree holders. HBCUs produce 42 percent of all African American postsecondary degree holders in the sciences, technology engineering, mathematics and one in seven African American medical school graduates. Although MSIs are leading the way in training people of color in health professions, they currently lack essential resources to realize their full potential in this space. We hope you agree that this must be an urgent national priority. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Congresswoman Robin Kelly
Member of Congress
Chair, CBC Health Braintrust

Member of Congress

/s/

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

/s/

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

/s/

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

/s/

Karen Bass
Member of Congress