



June 3, 2020

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Mike Pence  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump and Vice President Pence:

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the Academy)<sup>i</sup> and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)<sup>ii</sup> recently sent congressional leadership a letter asking for funding to support allied health professions in higher education for minority-serving institutions. We need your administration's support and leadership to champion the representation of underrepresented communities of color in health professions.

The Academy and NAFEO 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 33 percent of hospitalizations for COVID-19.<sup>iii</sup> In addition to myriad socioeconomic factors, the Academy believes 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 requested \$310 million for the Department of Education, of which \$300 million would be set aside for grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, 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.<sup>iv</sup> 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 and ask that your administration join Congress in supporting these efforts.

Sincerely,



Patricia M. Babjak  
Chief Executive Officer  
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



Dr. Lezli Baskerville, Esq.  
President & CEO  
National Association for Equal  
Opportunity in Higher Education

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<sup>i</sup> The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals founded in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1917, by a visionary group of women dedicated to helping the government conserve food and improve the public's health and nutrition during World War I. Today, the Academy represents more than 100,000 credentialed practitioners — registered dietitian nutritionists, dietetic technicians, registered, and other dietetics and nutrition professionals holding undergraduate and advanced degrees in nutrition and dietetics, and students — and is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy. Learn more at <https://www.eatrightpro.org/>.

<sup>ii</sup> NAFEO is the 51-yr old 501(c) (3)-membership association of the nation's 104 HBCUs and roughly 80 PBIs. NAFEO serves as ***“the voice for blacks in higher education.”*** NAFEO members represent more than 700,000 students, 70,000 faculty, and 7 million alumni worldwide. HBCUs have roughly a \$15 billion short-term economic impact. They graduate 50% of African American public school education professionals; in excess of 40% of African Americans who get advanced degrees in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); 60% of African American health professionals; and growing percentages of African Americans in sustainability and Homeland Security professions, the arts, and humanities. Learn more at [www.nafeo.org](http://www.nafeo.org).

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. MMWR: Hospitalization Rates and Characteristics of Patients Hospitalized with Laboratory-Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 — COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1–30, 2020. April 8, 2020. Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm?s\\_cid=mm6915e3\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm?s_cid=mm6915e3_w).

<sup>iv</sup> Dr. William E. Spriggs, Professor/Former Chair Department of Economics, Howard University; Chief Economist, AFL-CIO; Chief Economist, NAFEO, Blacks and STEM: Understanding the Issues- A NAFEO Report, July 2018.