

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (FL-24)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"Postsecondary Innovation: Preparing Today's Students for Tomorrow's Opportunities"

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, thank you Chairman Owens, good morning. I want to express my gratitude to our witnesses for your testimony today. Welcome to the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development.

The promise of higher education in America is that any student—no matter where they're from or the color of their skin—can access the benefits of a high-quality college degree.

The evidence is clear that a college degree holds the key to the American Dream.

For instance, individuals with a bachelor's degree typically make about \$1 million more than high school graduates over their lifetimes and experience higher employment levels.

However, the declining value of the Pell Grant and state disinvestment in higher education have forced students and families to shoulder more of the cost of college.

These rising costs particularly burdens Black college students. Over the last decade, we are seeing declines in Black student enrollment. This is unacceptable.

We, as members of this subcommittee, are responsible for guaranteeing that any student who wants to earn a college degree can do so.

So, we must implement structural reforms that simultaneously tackle the challenge of making college more affordable and help the facilitation of recruiting a more diverse student body.

Innovation can play a key role in making these reforms a reality.

Improving wraparound student services—including career counseling, financial assistance, and employment support—can help students complete their degrees on time.

We can facilitate clear pathways to college by offering students with flexible learning opportunities and ensuring institutions help students complete their education.

But sacrificing equal access and opportunity for innovation is a disservice to students.

Dual enrollment programs are a great example of the potential of innovative practices and strategies that will propel our quality of education.

Dual enrollment helps high school students get ahead. They get a head start on college and can reduce the cost of getting a degree.

Unfortunately, dual enrollment programs are far more accessible to a White, affluent student body as opposed to students of color.

Proper investment in the recruitment and retention of minority students could drastically improve dual-enrollment student body diversity and ensure this innovation program reaches all students.

It's clear that my Republican colleagues oppose Democratic efforts to hold institutions accountable for guaranteeing equal access to higher education opportunities.

Our objective here is to ensure that institutions utilize evidence-based approaches to guarantee the success of these initiatives for everyone.

Simply put, when we talk about innovation and higher education, we must remember that our responsibility is to expand, not limit, access to a high-quality degree. We must ensure access to high quality degrees while innovating in higher education.

So, I look forward to hearing more about these successes and exploring innovative strategies to help students complete college and reach their full potential.

I yield back Mr. Chair.