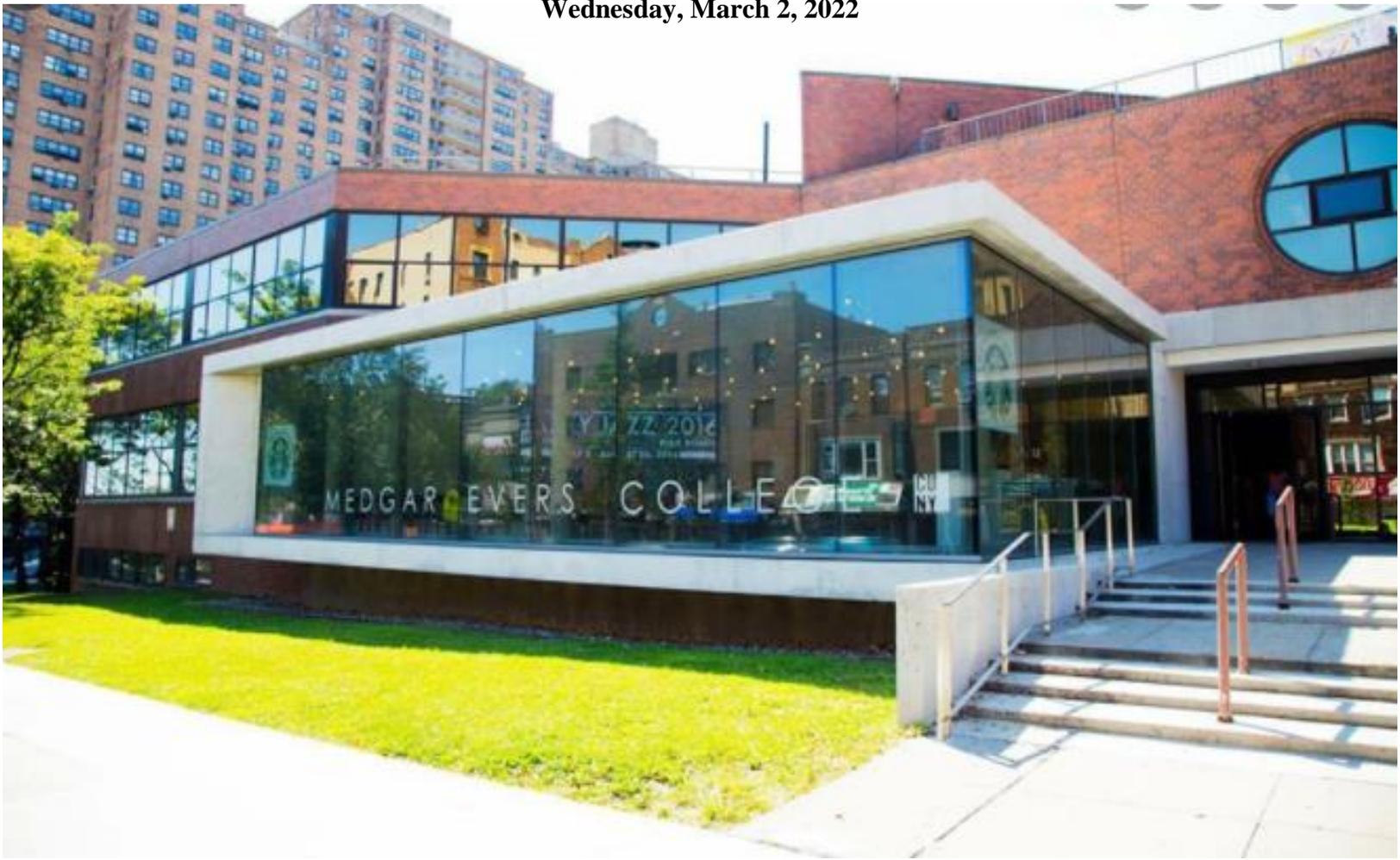


**Testimony of  
Dr. Patricia Ramsey  
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**Before the**

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Higher Education and Workforce Investment Subcommittee  
Subcommittee hearing: Investing in Economic Mobility:  
The Important Role of Hispanic Serving Institutions and Other Minority Serving Institutions**

**Wednesday, March 2, 2022**



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## **Opening Remarks**

I would like to thank the Honorable Chairman Bobby Scott and Ranking member Virginia Foxx of the Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee Chair Frederica S. Wilson and Ranking Member Miller Meeks of the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment, for the invitation to speak about Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs) during this subcommittee hearing on Investing in Economic Mobility: The Important Role of Hispanic Serving Institutions and Other Minority Serving Institutions.

My name is Patricia Ramsey and I am the 6<sup>th</sup> President of Medgar Evers College, the first woman and first scientist to be appointed to the position, not quite one year ago. I formerly served as Senior Executive Fellow at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Interim President, Professor and Chair of Natural Sciences, all at Bowie State University, and got my start as chief academic officer at Shaw University in Raleigh, NC, where I served as Vice President for Academic Affairs.

I earned the Ph.D. in Biology from Georgetown University, a Master of Arts in Biology from Harvard University, a Master of Science in Botany from Howard University, and a Bachelor of Science in Biology Education from Norfolk State University, an institution that's in Chairman Scott's district.

## **Introduction**

CUNY-Medgar Evers College is a member institution in the City University of New York, the nation's leading urban public university. The City University of New York, headed by Chancellor Felix V. Matos Rodríguez, serves more than 275,000 degree-seeking students each year. A 2017 study, conducted by then Stanford University economist Raj Chetty showed that CUNY propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all eight Ivy League colleges – plus Duke, M.I.T., Stanford, and the University of Chicago combined. The University comprises 25 colleges; two of the senior colleges, Medgar Evers College and York Colleges, are PBIs. A very diverse University, CUNY is also home to 9 senior colleges six community colleges and a graduate center, with the HSI designation.

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Medgar Evers College, one of the newest CUNY institutions, was born out of the civil rights movement and social justice struggles of the late '60s. The College is named for the slain civil rights leader and icon Medgar Wiley Evers, who stood for excellence and the fight to preserve human rights and equality. Central Brooklyn, where the college is situated, is a densely populated, low-income area of the borough and was one of the hardest hit communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the majority of the students coming from Brooklyn, the demographics of the College reflect the diversity of its surrounding community: 85 percent of the students are Black. Pre-pandemic, Medgar Evers College enrolled 5,800 students, mostly in credit-bearing degree programs in the Fall of 2019 and by the fall of 2021 the enrollment had fallen to 4,134 students.

Medgar Evers College's philosophy that education has the power to positively transform the lives of individuals is still at the core of its mission. Thus, the degree programs and community services provided by Medgar Evers College address a critical need, by supporting career pathways for people of color who are predominantly first-generation college students and immigrants. Medgar Evers College seeks to ensure that its students receive a high-quality education regardless of their means. It is committed to its mission of promoting social justice and strengthening equal access to people of color and underserved populations. In October 2020, two nearby Brooklyn subway stations were formally renamed for Medgar Evers College, commemorating the civil rights icon and celebrating the institution on its 50th anniversary.

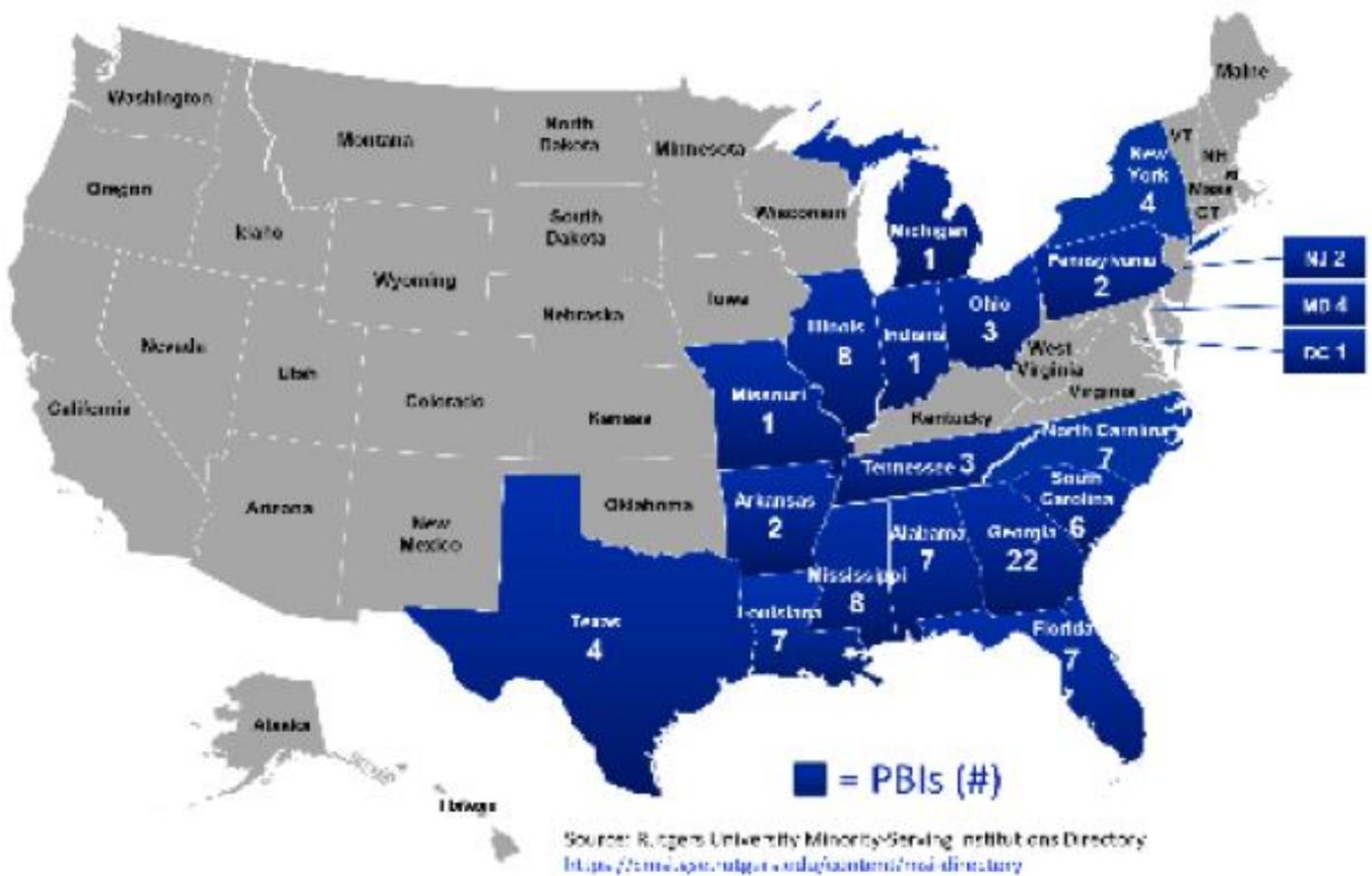
### **Understanding PBIs**

PBIs are included as a classification of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) under the Higher Education Act. Continuing to highlight the needs of MSIs is vital. All MSIs must be at the forefront of legislative initiatives and funding equity conversations and must be provided adequate funding to meet the needs of the important populations they serve.

PBIs are often confused with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). However, they are distinct; an institution cannot be both an HBCU and a PBI. Understanding that the student demographics are similar, organizations such as the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, UNCF and NAFEO provide grant opportunities to benefit students at both institutional types.

PBIs are a mix of four-year and two-year institutions that are aimed at educating the underserved. PBI student populations are majority low-income and first-generation students, and they face unique challenges related to college readiness, financial need, retention, and graduation rates. The CCRAA created PBI designation was established in 2007 under the Predominantly Black Institution Act sponsored by then Senator Barack Obama, while serving the state of Illinois as a U.S. senator.

As you can see on the map below, PBIs are located in the north, the south and the mid-west.



Source: Husch Blackwell's *HB Communities for Change*

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## Characteristics of PBIs

- Serve at least 1,000 undergraduate students
- Enroll at least 40% African American students
- Have a low per full-time undergraduate student expenditure, in comparison with other institutions offering similar instruction (for example, the tuition at Medgar Evers for the current year is \$6,930 and fees are \$423, for a total of \$7,353 per year for tuition and fees for in-state, full-time undergraduate students, which is more than 30% less than the national average of cost of in-state tuition and fees, according to the national average presented in College Board's, Annual Survey of Colleges
- Have at least 50% low-income or first-generation degree-seeking undergraduate enrollment

Different than the genesis of HBCUs, most PBIs began as predominately white institutions but because of demographic shifts, these institutions became predominately black. CUNY-Medgar Evers College, on the other hand, was birthed out of advocacy of the black community, in Central Brooklyn, for a 4-year institution in their community; thus, Medgar Evers College has been predominantly black since it was chartered in 1970 but could not benefit from federal formula funding until nearly 40 years after being established.

## Economic Mobility

According to published data, the median family income of students at Medgar Evers College is less than \$35,000.00 per year. CUNY-Medgar Eves College and CUNY-York College, which are both PBIs, are in the top 50 institutions for upward social mobility (*U.S. News and World Report*).

“At a time when so many Americans feel left behind, it is important for policymakers and educators alike to recognize the value of higher education in promoting upward mobility, and to strengthen this value proposition by ensuring that those institutions in the best position to educate low-income students receive the resources they need” (*ACE's Center for Policy Research and Strategy*).

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## Return on Investment

To remain competitive on a global level, this nation must increase the traditionally underrepresented groups in STEM. PBI institutions play a significant role in addressing shortage areas. If one were to focus strictly on graduation rates, there would be some missed opportunities, because how the graduation rate is determined is basically flawed. Many people don't understand that graduation rates as currently defined by the U.S. Department of Education, is a measure of the cohort of first time, full-time, first semester, degree or certificate seeking undergraduate students that complete their requirements within 150 percent of normal program completion time. If it takes a bachelor's degree-seeking student any factor more than six years, the student isn't counted and thus, the graduation rate is negatively impacted. Also, students who transfer from one school to another, students that start in the spring rather than the fall and students who begin matriculation part-time are not counted in the graduation rates. Therefore, institutions with the neediest students, such as PBIs and other minority serving institutions, have hundreds of students who graduate but are not counted in the graduation rate. Therefore, these institutions are not considered a good return on investment. Yet, you have institutions such as Medgar Evers College that is number 2 in CUNY for producing graduates with science degrees. Since many funders use graduation rates as a determiner of an institution's success, institutions like Medgar Evers College are denied funding, based on a faulty assumption; therefore, **the federal definition of graduation rate needs to change!**

### **Funding Need for PBIs**

Both CUNY PBIs, Medgar Evers College and York College, had a challenging budget year for Fiscal Year 2020-21. Some factors included decreased enrollment and decreased collections, primarily due to COVID. These shortfalls were largely offset by Federal CARES Act and CRRSAA funds which averted the colleges ending the fiscal year in the red.

- All MSIs need strong and proper federal support to address their unique needs.
- PBIs, like other MSIs, provide underserved and underrepresented communities with significant access to higher education, and similarly experience funding challenges.
- Including PBIs as a greater stakeholder in the national funding equity conversation will not only highlight the need for further federal PBI assistance but will provide a more

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accurate picture of the needs of institutions throughout the country, which primarily serve Black students.

- In order to strengthen PBIs, and in keeping with similar efforts to strengthen other MSIs, funding conversations must expand to include how increased and more equitable funding can be achieved. As just one example, current dedicated funding streams do exist for PBIs for which we are grateful, but an opportunity exists for increased equity in such funding.
  - Specifically, the Higher Education Act (HEA) currently provides support for PBIs through two programs known as the Strengthening Predominantly Black Institutions and PBI Master's Degree programs. Under the Strengthening PBIs program, both mandatory and discretionary funding under Title III-A for formula grants or Title III-F for competitive grants are provided. Historically, funding was also available through the PBI Master's Degree program, but funding for this program lapsed in 2014.
  - In 2021, PBIs, serving approximately 290,000 students, were allocated only \$28 million through the Strengthening Predominately Black Institutions program, which amounts to about \$138 per PBI student. For 2022, Congress has allocated approximately \$40,000,000 in funding for PBIs (this includes \$17,000,000 in Institutional Aid for PBIs plus \$23,000,000 in funding, with still no allocation for the PBI Master's Degree Program).
  - Considering that at least 50% of all PBI undergraduate students are low-income and/or first-generation, this amount is simply still too low.

### **Potential Solutions Under Discussion**

- A group of PBI presidents have come together and have been taking steps to increase awareness and to highlight the need for Congress to consider increasing current PBI funding streams, replenish lapsed funding streams, and develop new opportunities for funding through future legislation.
- We ask the Committee to support:
  - Increased funding for the existing *Strengthening Predominantly Black Institutions* program

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- Increased reinstated funding for the *Master's Degree Programs at Predominantly Black Institutions* (which has not been funded in more than seven years).
  - We also ask that the Committee consider and support new legislative solutions, including:
    - Creating new funding for **PBI professional degree programs** that prepare students for licensure in their chosen vocation
    - Enhancing funding for **workforce development** programs at PBIs.

To enact proper support for higher education institutions serving Black students, PBI funding must be increased to adequate levels through proper funding streams that remain adequately funded year after year.

I want to end my testimony with a story that highlights the need for increased PBI funding. There are numerous students who attend our institutions that experience housing instability and food insecurity. They don't have the basic necessities for good health, so it stands to reason that they are not going to be able to realize their full potential, academically. Recognizing the need to attempt to address this issue, Medgar Evers College established a unit at the college called the *Transition Academy* (TA). TA is being led by an alumnus who understands the plight of these students. His story is very compelling but is not mine to tell. However, I will say that he came to Medgar Evers with a G.E.D. and in 2021 received a doctoral degree from a prestigious institution. Throughout the pandemic, *Transition Academy* provided food for students from the food pantry, and even, in some instances, delivered food to places where these students resided, during the "lockdown." In the 2020-2021 academic year, TA distributed 3,724 bags of food, helped students navigate the shelter system, assisted students with food vouchers, assisted with transportation, and provided new and gently used clothing, to name some of the services.

This story demonstrates some of the need that students experience who attend institutions like Medgar Evers College and other PBIs. Therefore, it is my hope that at the forefront of your thinking will be the consideration of increased and sustained funding for PBIs, because to strengthen these institutions strengthens this nation!

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Thanks so much for the opportunity to bring these important matters to the hearing of the Committee and to provide greater clarity around the topic of PBIs, the students that they serve, and their important role in strengthening this nation's economy.

I'd be pleased to respond to any questions that you might have regarding this testimony.