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November 10, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

We are deeply alarmed by the recent U.S. Department of Education (ED) employee terminations¹ and are concerned about the negative impact the terminations will have on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Press reports indicate that 64 employees within ED's Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) have been terminated through a Reduction in Force (RIF), leaving the office nearly empty.² Among other responsibilities, OPE oversees the HBCU, TCU, and MSI institutional aid programs Congress has authorized under Titles III and V of the *Higher Education Act of 1965*. This office also serves as an essential communicator between ED and these institutions. We are extremely concerned that gutting OPE and other offices at ED will make it difficult for HBCUs, TCUs, MSIs to serve their students.

HBCUs were established with a mission to serve and educate Black Americans who had been systematically excluded from higher education throughout America's history of slavery and

¹ Laura Meckler and Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, *Trump moves closer to eliminating Education Department amid shutdown*, The Washington Post (Oct. 18, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/10/18/trump-education-department-cuts/>.

² Mark Lieberman, *Education Department Layoffs Would Affect Dozens of Programs. See Which Ones*, EdWeek (Oct. 16, 2025), <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/education-department-layoffs-would-affect-dozens-of-programs-see-which-ones/2025/10#ope>.

racial discrimination. TCUs were created with a mission to preserve and advance Native culture, language, and traditions through holistically educating Native students and the larger tribal communities. Congress federally recognized HBCUs in the *Higher Education Act of 1965* and TCUs in the 1992 reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*. The MSI designations were established by Congress to help low-resourced institutions expand educational opportunities for students from backgrounds historically underrepresented in higher education, including low-income students and students of color. Often, HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs are doing more to provide a high-quality collegiate experience for their students with fewer resources than other institutions. That is why the federal government must continue to support their efforts by providing robust and continued resources.

Instead, this alarming action is a substantial threat to the success of HBCUs, TCUs, MSIs, and the students they serve. OPE terminations will make it harder for these institutions to serve out their missions of educating students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. It is completely unclear how HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs should communicate with ED about their grants or any challenges they face following this RIF. Former OPE employees have emphasized that there will not be any staff to “organize and set up... grant-application processes to ensure that the regulations and statutes are being followed accurately.”³ Further, without the guidance, technical assistance, and general support that OPE staff typically provide, institutions will struggle to deliver high-quality services to their students who rely on federally funded programs to succeed in college. The reckless decision to eliminate staff at OPE makes it difficult to have confidence that the Administration will maintain the commitment to helping these students.

In a recent social media post about the widespread RIF, you argued that the government shutdown and RIF created an opportunity to “evaluate what federal responsibilities are truly critical for the American people.”⁴ Changes to the Department’s statutory responsibilities can only be made by Congress through statute. While we hope you can agree serving the colleges that educate America’s students is truly critical, only Congress has the authority to direct the Department to stop fulfilling any of its statutory responsibilities, regardless of what your “evaluation” concludes. We urge you to immediately reverse the layoffs and provide transparent information to Congress on how the Office of Postsecondary Education is equipped to fully support HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs. Without these employees, the success of students at HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, and across higher education is at risk.

³ Jessica Blake, *Trump’s Layoffs Gut Office of Postsecondary Ed*, Inside Higher Ed (Oct. 15, 2025), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/student-aid-policy/2025/10/15/trumps-latest-layoffs-gut-office-postsecondary-ed>.

⁴ Lexi Lonas Cochran, *Parents of children with disabilities worry as Education Department shrinks*, The Hill (Oct. 17, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5558750-education-department-trump-mcmahon-parents-schools-students-with-disabilities/>.

The Honorable Linda

November 10, 2025

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Sincerely,



ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT

Ranking Member

Committee on Education and Workforce



ALMA S. ADAMS, Ph.D.

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Development