



September 18, 2023

Honorable Sarah Huckabee Sanders
Governor of Arkansas
State Capitol, Room 250
Little Rock, Arkansas 85007

Dear Governor Sanders:

As we work toward expanding America's position as a world leader, it is our shared goal to produce the best and the brightest talent that any country has to offer. We know that you and other Governors around the country are deeply focused on and committed to education, as evidenced by the significant portion of state budgets allocated to education spending. We also know you share the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to the goal of excellence in education for all students. It is through the opportunities provided to our students that we will be able to innovate beyond what we thought was possible just a few years ago and even today.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Minority Serving Institutions make innumerable contributions to our country through the research produced by their faculty, achievements of their students and alumni, and services that they provide to the immediate community. As noted in the HBCU PARTNERS Act, while HBCUs, including 1890 land-grant institutions, represent 3 percent of postsecondary institutions, they enroll about 10 percent of all Black college students. Furthermore, these institutions generate close to \$15 billion in economic impact and over 134,000 jobs annually in the local and regional economies they serve.

To ensure we are able to compete at a high level and develop the strong workforce that will propel this country into the future, generate the next wave of job creators, and fuel our economy, it is imperative that high-quality educational opportunities are available to all students. The Second Morrill Act of 1890 required that states choosing to open a second land-grant institution to serve Black students, provide an equitable distribution of funds between their 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, the 1890 land-grant institution in your state, while producing extraordinary graduates that contribute greatly to the state's economy and the fabric of our nation, has not been able to advance in ways that are on par with University of Arkansas, the original Morrill Act of 1862 land-grant institution in your state, in large part due to unbalanced funding.

The longstanding and ongoing underinvestment in University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff disadvantages the students, faculty, and community that the institution serves. Furthermore, it may contribute to a lack of economic activity that would ultimately benefit Arkansas. It is our hope that we can work together to make this institution whole after decades of being underfunded.

Using readily available data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Survey (IPEDS) that ranges from 1987 to 2020, we calculated the amount that these institutions would have received if their state funding per student were equal to that of 1862 institutions. Unequitable funding of the 1890 institution in your state has caused a severe financial gap, in the last 30 years alone, an additional \$330,935,712 would have been available for the university. These funds could have supported infrastructure and student services and would have better positioned the university to compete for research grants. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff has been able to make remarkable strides and would be much stronger and better positioned to serve its students, your state, and the nation if made whole with respect to this funding gap.

It is encouraging to learn that in recent years (the 2020 data from IPEDS) your state budget has taken steps to address this historic underinvestment, and it is our hope that we can work together to start a dialogue and develop a plan of action to make this institution whole after decades of being underfunded.

In recent years, some states have begun addressing this issue. In some instances, legislatures have provided significant state allocations. In others, students and alumni have formed coalitions to pursue court orders that ultimately required states to allocate remedial funding.

This is a situation that clearly predates all of us. However, it is a problem that we can work together to solve. In fact, it is our hope that we can collaborate to avoid burdensome and costly litigation that has occurred in several states.

Given the large amount of state funding that is owed to University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, it would be ambitious to address the funding disparity over the course of several years in the state budget. It might very well be your desire to do so, which we wholeheartedly support. Yet, if an ambitious timetable is not a possibility, we suggest a combination of a substantial state allocation toward the 1890 deficit combined with a forward-looking budget commitment for a two-to-one match of federal land-grant funding for these institutions in order to bring parity to funding levels. To date, while your state has sufficiently appropriated funds to the 1862 land-grant institution, including meeting or exceeding designated one-to-one federal match funding, it has not done so for the 1890 land-grant university in recent years.

We want to make abundantly clear that it is not necessary to reduce funding to other institutions, nor make a reduction in general fund allocations to University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in addressing these disparities.

We are at an inflection point that will determine our place in the world as leaders. We need to solidify our country as the top producer of talent and innovation – demonstrating to the global community that nothing can beat American ingenuity. The state that serves as our nation’s economic engine for the next generation is sure to be one that fully realizes all its assets and is committed to ensuring that opportunity is equally distributed. Given the career opportunities that will be available due to recent bipartisan federal investments for key industries, strengthening these universities to provide tomorrow’s workforce will enhance your state’s economic viability.

The Departments of Education and Agriculture, working with your state budget office, would welcome hosting a workshop to fully examine the funding data that we shared in this letter. We are committed to working with you to bring balance to the state investments in institutions that have been severely underfunded through the years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel Cardona".

Miguel Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Thomas J. Vilsack".

Thomas J. Vilsack
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture