

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney

Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing

**Hearing on “HBCUs at Risk: Examining Federal Support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities”
March 17, 2022**

The Oversight Committee is holding today’s bipartisan hearing to examine how the federal government can support Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the face of threats to student safety. I want to thank Congressman Byron Donalds for requesting this hearing. Congressman Donalds, I look forward to continuing to work with you to support HBCUs.

Since the beginning of the year, at least 36 Historically Black Colleges and Universities—more than one third of all HBCUs—have been targeted by bomb threats. At least 18 HBCUs were targeted on February 1st, the first day of Black History Month. Just this week, a threat targeting Morehouse College, in Atlanta, forced students to shelter in place.

The threats of violence and intimidation have halted classes across the country and caused campuses to go into lockdown. These threats have also negatively impacted the wellbeing of students attending HBCUs, causing them to fear for their safety and placing a significant strain on their mental health.

In one threatening call targeting Spelman College, an HBCU for women in Atlanta, a caller claimed they had singled out that school for one reason: “there are too many Black students in it.”

These reprehensible threats against Black institutions echo the tactics employed by the Ku Klux Klan and others decades ago as they tried to instill terror in the Black community and prevent Black Americans from gaining civil rights. And today’s threats come amid a rise in hate crimes and violent white supremacy across the country that has targeted the Black community and other racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.

HBCUs play a critical role in promoting equity through economic and educational opportunities for Black Americans. They also provide Black students with a safe space to explore their collective identities and cultures.

Our beloved former Chairman, Elijah Cummings, was a proud alumnus of Howard University and a member of the Board of Regents at Morgan State University. He explained that HBCUs were created because other schools had racist admission policies and refused to admit African American students. And he warned: “While segregation has ended, structural racism still exists in society today. That is why HBCUs still matter.”

HBCUs matter, and every HBCU student matters. That is why we must do everything possible to support them, especially when they are threatened or attacked.

It is imperative that law enforcement agencies prioritize holding perpetrators accountable and working to keep campuses safe—while also pursuing a broader strategy to address the rising tide of violent white supremacy in this country.

President Biden has rightly described the threats of violence against HBCUs as cowardly and un-American, and the Biden-Harris Administration has led a strong, multi-agency response to support HBCUs in the face of these threats. Just yesterday I was proud to join Vice President Harris—a proud HBCU alumna—as she announced the Administration is making new grant funds available for HBCUs targeted by bomb threats.

The FBI is actively investigating the bomb threats to HBCUs, which it has called its, “highest priority.” The Department of Education and Department of Homeland Security have expanded coordination with HBCUs and are providing guidance and tools to help HBCUs keep their campuses safe.

I appreciate that all three of these agencies are participating in today’s hearing. I want to remind Members that these threats are being actively investigated, so our witnesses will not be able to answer any questions that could compromise ongoing investigations.

Congress also has an important role to play.

Last week, I proudly voted for a resolution condemning these bomb threats, led by Representative Adams and Representative Hill, which unanimously passed the House.

But we must do more. We need to pass the [IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act](#) to increase investments in HBCUs and provide funds that can be used to strengthen campus security. Congress should also pass the [Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act](#), which would enhance the government’s ability to counter domestic terrorism. Both of these bills are bipartisan.

Finally, I want to recognize Congressman Jamie Raskin for his leadership on these issues as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Chairman Raskin has worked tirelessly to confront violent white supremacy and expose its connection to the recent surge of domestic violent extremism. He has also pushed for a national strategy to combat domestic violent extremism, which the Biden Administration adopted this year. I thank him for his partnership on this hearing.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Comer, for an opening statement.

###

Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181