



STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA

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October 2, 2023

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Cardona and Secretary Vilsack:

As the Chancellor of the State University System of Florida and CEO of the Board of Governors, I am responsible for implementing policies and regulations adopted by the Board, which impacts 12 institutions of higher education and over 430,000 students annually. The Board is responsible for administering laws enacted by the Florida Legislature regarding higher education.

While your claim of a financial gap totaling \$1,973,081,216 may be fitting for a headline in the press, it does not accurately tell the full story of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU).

It seems the federal government's solution to all problems is additional spending. The federal government annually operates with significant budget deficits and our nation faces an ever-increasing national debt. In contrast, under Governor DeSantis, the state of Florida annually balances its budget and continues to pay down its state debt. This strong fiscal discipline under Governor DeSantis has provided the state of Florida with the means to make significant investments in FAMU during his administration.

When Governor DeSantis was first elected in 2018, the total recurring operational funding provided for FAMU was \$103,216,776. In the current budget, FAMU's operational funding is \$142,011,392. During the DeSantis administration, FAMU's operational funding increased by 37.6 percent.

In addition to this recurring operational funding, during the DeSantis administration, FAMU received \$26,533,009 in general revenue funding for operational support and programs.

October 2, 2023

Page 2 of 5

Furthermore, when the two niche outliers (low enrollment Honors and STEM colleges) are excluded, the average state funding per FTE in the ten remaining State University System of Florida institutions is \$9,328. The state funding per FTE at FAMU is \$14,773. FAMU receives the highest state funding per FTE. FAMU receives 58.4 percent more funding per FTE than the average SUS University.

In Florida, our universities can carry forward appropriated funds that are unexpended during the fiscal year. When Governor DeSantis was elected, FAMU had \$34,600,000 available in carry-forward funds. In our current fiscal year, FAMU has \$37,097,588 available in carry-forward funds. Under Governor DeSantis, operational carry-forward funds increased by 7.2 percent.

From 2018 when Governor DeSantis was elected through this year, significant investment has been made in FAMU in funding for Fixed Capital Outlay (FCO). During the DeSantis administration, state FCO appropriations to FAMU include:

- \$31,244,465 in funding for Maintenance/Repair,
- \$22,877,435 in funding for Remodeling/Renovations,
- \$27,700,000 in funding for Infrastructure,
- \$28,345,000 in funding for New Construction
- \$9,016,228 in funding for Student Activities/Recreation
- \$119,183,128 total in new FCO appropriations for facilities.

Our State University System of Florida provided support to FAMU through the approval of \$125,000,000 in debt issuance to finance a student residential facility containing 700 new beds and a dining hall. Also, our system is currently working with FAMU on another proposal to approve debt issuance for a second student residential facility with an additional 700 new beds.

Under the DeSantis administration, FAMU has received a record amount of funding. That funding has been successfully deployed through the leadership of President Larry Robinson and his administration to maximize the benefit for all FAMU students.

FAMU is a successful institution with students reaping the benefits. Since 2020 and in the latest, "2023-2024 Best Colleges" rankings from U.S. News and World Report, FAMU has been ranked as the #1 public HBCU in the nation. This year, for the first time, FAMU broke into the Top 100 Public National Universities with a ranking of 91.

Contrast that with where FAMU was in the year Governor DeSantis took office. In 2019 FAMU was RNP (Ranking Not Published). For editorial purposes, U.S. News only published rankings for the top 90 percent of schools in each ranking category, the

October 2, 2023

Page 3 of 5

remaining schools were unranked. This means FAMU has vaulted up from the bottom 10 percent of National Public Universities into the Top 100 during the DeSantis administration.

The State University System of Florida is proud of the support FAMU has received from Governor DeSantis and the Florida legislature. You can see the effects of that support in the success of FAMU's students.

When Governor DeSantis was elected, the most recent cohort of FAMU students had a four-year graduation rate of 21.6 percent. The most recent cohort of FAMU students has a four-year graduation rate of 28.4 percent, a significant improvement of 31.5 percent.

When Governor DeSantis was elected, 68.9 percent of the FAMU student population had a student loan. Today, only 38.5 percent of the FAMU student population has a student loan. While the number of students who require a student loan continues to increase nationwide, FAMU has seen a 44 percent decrease of students in debt.

The average student loan for FAMU students when Governor DeSantis was elected was \$8,710. Today, the average student loan for a FAMU student is \$6,450. While student debt increases exponentially nationwide, the decreasing percentage of FAMU students who do require a loan are taking out loans that are, on average, 25 percent smaller than those taken on prior to the DeSantis administration.

Our FAMU students benefit from state investments in faculty, classroom operations, new classroom and lab facilities, investments in housing, and the campus life experience. Under the DeSantis administration, FAMU students have improved their graduation rates, while the number of students in debt and their student loan amounts have decreased. The state of Florida supports its #1 ranked public HBCU, FAMU, and we will continue to support FAMU in the future.

Florida's success with diverse populations doesn't end with FAMU. Earlier this summer, Secretary Cardona expressed concerns regarding maintaining diversity in higher education in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to assure you that diversity in higher education can be achieved without affirmative action and offer the example Florida has already set. Due to Florida's focus on merit-based, color-blind admissions, our State University System offers some of the most diverse higher education experiences in the nation.

October 2, 2023

Page 4 of 5

The most recent U.S. Department of Education data for fall enrollment in post-secondary institutions by race shows the State University System of Florida has a black and Hispanic student enrollment higher than the national average. Florida's fall 2021 data shows that 42 percent of our total undergraduate students are black or Hispanic, significantly higher than the national average of 29 percent. Florida's minority enrollment is 44.8 percent higher than the national average.

Florida has accomplished this diversity through efforts and policies focused on merit instead of preferential treatment. With a race-neutral admissions strategy, students understand that they are admitted to one of Florida's universities not because of the color of their skin but because of the excellence of their academic performance.

There is no single factor more important to access than cost. Florida has the lowest in-state undergraduate tuition in the nation. Despite increases nationally, student costs in Florida have continued to decrease. After factoring in all financial aid programs, the average price of an undergraduate degree for in-state students is down to \$3,020.

Florida's cost to students is low because Governor DeSantis refuses to raise tuition, and the state legislature generously funds higher education while keeping the state university system accountable for results through performance-based funding.

According to the 2022 SHEF report by SHEEO, Florida's total higher education revenues comprise 84.1 percent from state appropriations and only 15.9 percent from net tuition. The national averages are 48.72 percent from state appropriations and 51.25 percent from net tuition.

Student debt incurred by Florida university students has also decreased significantly. During the 2021-2022 academic year, 77 percent of Florida resident undergrads had no student loans. Furthermore, 89 percent of state-resident undergraduate Pell Grant recipients have enough gift aid to cover 100 percent of the required tuition and fees.

However, it's not enough to merely accept students and lower the cost of education. Access is only the first step. Success is retention through graduation. The most recent available data shows that Florida's four-year graduation rate for students who identify as black or African American is 40.8 percent compared to the national average of 25.8 percent. Florida's four-year graduation rate for black or African American students is 58.1 percent higher than the national average.

Florida's four-year graduation rate for students who identify as Hispanic or Latino is 51.1 percent, compared to the national average of 34.0 percent. Florida's four-year

October 2, 2023

Page 5 of 5

graduation rate for Hispanic or Latino students is 50.3 percent higher than the national average.

In fact, nearly half of all bachelor's degrees awarded by the State University System of Florida during 2021-22 went to students who identify as African American or Hispanic/Latino.

While higher education is struggling across the nation, the State University System of Florida and our institutions, like FAMU, are soaring. Our State University System of Florida is demonstrating how public higher education can succeed in today's challenging environment.

Our results speak for themselves. Please contact my office if you want to learn how to apply some of these successful methods championed by Governor DeSantis.

Sincerely,



Raymond Rodrigues
Chancellor