

Testimony of Thomas K. Hudson, President, Jackson State University

Good morning,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Thomas Hudson, 12th president of Jackson State University.

While I wish my presence before you were due to other circumstances, I believe this is a conversation or testimony of necessity. The recent bomb threats against the institution I lead, my alma mater, Jackson State University, and the almost two dozen other HBCUs, make a mockery of how far we have come as a nation.

There is always a group of individuals who will attempt to drag us back to the time when terrorizing our communities were frequent occurrences – often without admonishment.

The threat we received on Feb. 1, 2022, was an attempt once again to incite mass anxiety and fear reminiscent of yesteryear. The targeting of Black schools and sacred institutions has taken place in this country since their inception. Then and now, these threats are designed to intimidate and impede our sense of safety and freedom in an environment where our students deserve to feel protected at all times by all costs.

At JSU, we were fortunate that our local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies rallied behind us during this time. We appreciate the efforts of the Jackson Police Department, State of Mississippi Capitol Police and the FBI, who responded not just in words but in action, helping to provide the necessary resources to mitigate this threat. And of course, we thank the JSU Department of Public Safety, who on this day and everyday work hard to protect our campus and students.

Collectively, it is our responsibility to create safe environments for our campus community. They should be able to receive a nurturing learning experience in a protected environment free from distraction.

But what will it take for us to ensure the long-term protection of not only our students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders but the historical assets that are HBCUs. And, it is with this context that I would like to address the 3 key areas in which this committee may assist us in meeting the moment. And we meet this moment by helping HBCUs

Receive equitable resources;

Close the significant disparity between security challenges and funding; and

Counter those disparities thus ensuring sustainability.

I think we all know the history of HBCUs in America. That our institutions were founded to educate newly freed Black people who could not attend the already established colleges and universities. Today, there are over 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities in this country,

and together we have educated millions – helping them realize the American Dream that was elusive to their ancestors.

Over the past 75 years, HBCUs have provided undergraduate training for 75% of all Black Americans holding a doctorate degree, 75% of all Black officers in the armed forces; and 80% of all Black federal judges, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The intended disruption of HBCUs, like Jackson State University, is an intentional assault on the economic drivers of this country. It is also a deliberate attempt to destroy these cultural spaces where intellect and diverse thought thrives. And now, in 2022, we cannot sit idly by and simply wait for something to happen to these hallowed places. We cannot afford to be reactionary.

While we share similarities with other colleges and universities – indeed threats of violence may occur at any number of colleges – the truth is, unlike our counterparts, we have been routinely underfunded for years, which has led to deferred maintenance and deficiencies in our infrastructure.

This long-term under-funding has consequences.....it limits our ability to pivot in an emergency.

There is a significant mismatch between our security challenges and adequate funding levels to address this incongruity. This frequently puts HBCUs in a reactionary position due to our historical and persistent under-resourcing.

While we do our best to manage risks, preparedness has to be the priority in order to deal with relative threats and close security gaps routinely experienced in HBCU environments.

In short, our institutions need capacity-building resources for preparedness, mitigation and prevention. Because it is true that many of us sit in Urban locations with open campuses; JSU is located in the heart of the capital city. While these settings contribute to the vibrant culture found at HBCUs, they also make us especially vulnerable to the very threats being discussed today.

In addition, the lack of resources, unfortunately, finds many of our institutions with minimal staffing and sometimes limited on the ground expertise, especially in cybersecurity. The long-term infrastructure issues – some of which are finally being addressed thanks to members of this body – and the resulting years of deferred maintenance further compromises the physical security on our campus.

But there is a way forward.

At JSU, we aim to be a part of the solution by partnering with this body and others in addressing these deep-rooted issues. Our close collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security through the Office of Academic Engagement offers an exceptional opportunity to expand our capacity and access to much needed resources.

We seek the resources to develop and utilize Data Science technologies....so that we may better understand and motivate resilience strategies while we build trust in the most vulnerable communities. We do this as we search for meaningful solutions in collaboration with local and regional partners.

We also anticipate long-term investments to expand and sustain our criminal justice and urban planning programs in order to elevate and develop local and state-wide solutions and to serve as a national model and resource. These include:

- Building our capacity to onboard and graduate talented students – thus allowing us to deploy skilled criminal justice talent and human capital nationwide through the establishment of a Center for Excellence.
- Collaborating with state, local and federal law enforcement to identify emerging crime and security vulnerability trends
- Improve the translational value of relevant data for those with decision-making authority

We also need to acquire advanced security monitoring systems. Most HBCUs possess security data capture systems (often with limited distribution). However, these institutions often have low bandwidth and limited human resources for continuous monitoring. Further, enough server space may likely not be available for long-term data storage. These constitute major security challenges.

Developing a tiered approach to resolving HBCU security issues and concerns is a must. We must also develop partnerships with our public-school districts to jointly pursue initiatives for early interventions, conflict resolution training, and de-escalation protocols.

Lastly, we must ensure sustainability so we do not find ourselves once again repeating the past. This means access to the critical expertise necessary to conduct comprehensive security vulnerability assessments.... assessments that will help to identify gaps and challenges and ensure we appropriately address physical, logistical, and digital resilience campus-wide.

As HBCUs are major employers and economic drivers in our respective communities, it is vital that our institutions develop a community of practice principally focused on securing and strengthening the HBCU ecosystem for continued training, education, research and economic development.

I would like to close by saying we shall not be moved or paralyzed by malevolent threats. I am calling on you to help us bolster our arsenals because we all have the responsibility of ensuring our students can develop in environments free of violence, racism, and intolerance. We must protect our HBCUs, so that transformational education can and will always prevail.

Thank you so much for your time.