

# **ADDRESSING HISTORIC UNDERFUNDING OF HBCUS: IMPLEMENTING BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION IN TENNESSEE**

**ISSUE BRIEF 3**

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, there has been a renewed focus on HBCUs and their contributions to their communities and the nation at large. HBCUs serve as engines of economic mobility for students, prepare students for careers in which Black professionals are underrepresented, and generate nearly \$15 billion in economic impact across the United States.







As our first brief in this three-part series showed, states have historically disinvested in land grant HBCUs since their inception, leaving institutions to figure out who to educate students with minimal resources. Elected officials and institutions have

fought for decades to correct these issues to little avail. However, as the positive impacts of HBCUs and their graduate become more visible and publicized, there has been a bipartisan movement to correct remaining funding discrepancies and ensure HBCUs have the stability and financial investments to ensure their future sustainability.

This third and final brief will explore Tennessee and its legislative attempts to curb underfunding. It is our hope that these case-studies and the set of briefs provide a blue print for how elected officials in other states can form bipartisan coalitions to support HBCUs and ensure they are equitably funded.

### TENNESSEE'S HBCU LANDSCAPE

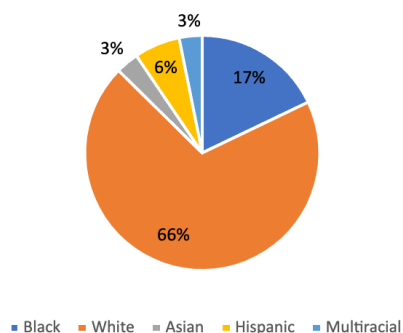
Tennessee is home to six Historically Black Colleges and Universities:

Private HBCUs					Public HBCU
<b>American Baptist College</b>  Founded in 1865 Nashville 96 percent of students are Black* 60 percent of students receive financial aid 60 percent receive Pell Grants**	<b>Fisk University</b>  Founded in 1866 Nashville 79 percent of students are Black* 94 percent of students receive financial aid 55 percent receive Pell Grants**	<b>Lane College</b>  Founded in 1882 Jackson 83 percent of students are Black* 93 percent of students receive financial aid 85 percent receive Pell Grants**	<b>LeMoyne-Owens College</b>  Founded in 1968 Memphis 98 percent of students are Black* 100 percent of students receive financial aid 98 percent receive Pell Grants**	<b>Meharry Medical College</b>  Founded in 1876 Nashville 87 percent of students are Black* Financial aid is not available as programs of study are at the graduate level.	<b>Tennessee State University</b>  Founded in 1912 Nashville 74 percent of students are Black* 73 percent of students receive financial aid 52 percent receive Pell Grants**

\*Fall 2021

\*\*2019-2020; First-Time Full-Time undergraduate students

### Tennessee's Higher Education Students



333,993 college students

To fully understand the intricacies of historic underfunding of HBCUs, and the various bipartisan avenues to correct these issues, it is important to explore state-specific case studies. The second brief of the three-part series explored systemic underfunding of HBCUs in Maryland, the legal challenges that brought the issue to the forefront, and the resolution that was formed in the state legislature.

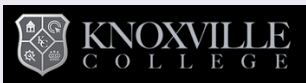
It is estimated that five of Tennessee's HBCUs generate \$873 million of total economic impact (Note: American Baptist College was not included in this



economic impact study). This is particularly important for HBCUs located in regions of the state where economic activity has been slow, making their impact on the community even more essential. Additionally, the 2,143 Tennessee HBCU graduates in 2014 are estimated to earn [\\$6 billion](#) over their lifetime, or 50 percent more than they could expect to earn without their college credential.

## KNOXVILLE COLLEGE

Tennessee is home to a seventh HBCU, Knoxville College.



Originally founded in 1875, the institution lost its accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1997. As enrollment declined, the institution was ready to shut its doors in 2015. However, with the support of alumni, students have been able to continue enrolling, with a class size of [over 60 students](#).

In 2021, Knoxville alum Leonard Adams, Jr., was named interim president. Adams has a 10-year plan to regain accreditation and act as a [catalyst to solve the Black poverty rate](#) in Knoxville.

As discussed in the [first brief](#), *The State of Higher Education Funding: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)*, many land grant institutions were underfunded when states did not provide the one-to-one matching dollars required by the Second Morrill Act. Tennessee State University, Tennessee's lone land grant and public HBCU, was found to be underfunded by [\\$1,917,395,299](#) between 1987 and 2020.

As a result, many states are working to remedy the historical disinvestment of HBCUs. The remainder of this brief aims to explore how the state of Tennessee addressed the underfunding of Tennessee State University.

## LAND GRANT INSTITUTION FUNDING HISTORY STUDY COMMITTEE

In 2017, in an effort to better support Tennessee's public and private HBCUs, the Tennessee General Assembly passed [HB0553](#), introduced by Representative Harold Love, Jr., to develop the Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Modeled after the [White House Initiative](#)

[on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), a Director of HBCU Success position was developed at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. However, The Consortium of HBCUs that was called for in the bill to foster a collective voice of Tennessee's HBCUs was not funded through the legislature and as a result does not currently exist.

*"HBCU Success at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of Tennessee's HBCUs to provide the highest quality education, increasing opportunities for these institutions to participate in and benefit from state programs, and ensuring that Tennessee has the highest proportion of college graduates from HBCUs in the country."*

[HBCU Success](#)

## THE LOVE LEGACY

Tennessee State University's funding was first discussed under Representative Love Sr.'s tenure as [state representative](#) from 1968 to 1994. The report, submitted to the Tennessee General Assembly in 1970, identified funding disparities and clear lack of funding for Tennessee State University. However, there was no corrective action plan or referendum, resulting in the state of Tennessee continuing to [deny Tennessee State University federally required funding](#) until 2007. Half a century later, Representative Harold Love Jr., Ph.D. continued his father's legacy by sponsoring [HB 0553](#) in 2017 and numerous other actions to bring voice to Tennessee's HBCUs.



Rep. Harold Love, Sr. Rep. Harold Love, Jr.

*"In one particular year, 1970, \$4.5 million came to Tennessee to be divided among the two land grants, but only \$51,000 went to Tennessee State. So [my father] said, 'That's not equitable. That's not fair. That's 99-to-1.'"*

[Representative Harold Love, Jr.](#)  
[Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow](#) | Cohort 5



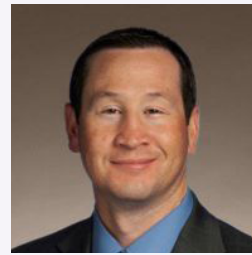
## TENNESSEE LAND GRANT INSTITUTION FUNDING HISTORY STUDY COMMITTEE



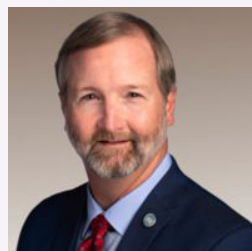
Co-Chair:  
Rep. Harold Love, Jr. (D)



Co-Chair:  
Sen. Richard Briggs (R)



Rep. Gary Hicks (R)



Rep. Chris Todd (R)



Sen. Janice Bowling (R)



Sen. Brenda Gilmore (D)

In 2020, The Tennessee General Assembly formed the Land Grant Institution Funding History Study Committee. The six-member bipartisan joint committee formed with the goal of “investigating why Tennessee State University (TSU) has never received its full federal grant match funding from the State of Tennessee that should have been allocated under the Land Grant laws that created the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).”

Through advocacy from the Land Grant Institution Funding History Study Committee, the Office of Legislative Budget Analysis found that between 1957 and 2007, Tennessee State University did not receive the required match from the state of Tennessee, and in many instances, did not receive the full amount of federal funding passed through the state. In order to estimate the amount of funding that Tennessee State University did not receive, the Committee calculated funding allocations per the funding formulas utilized between 1956 and 2006. Estimates found that Tennessee State University was owed between \$150 and \$544 million. Despite the historic underfunding of Tennessee State University, the Committee found that TSU began receiving their full match from Tennessee in 2015.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In 2021, Governor Bill Lee proposed \$250 million to Tennessee State University in his State of the State address. This allocation would address life-safety issues and deferred maintenance, as well as provide an investment in academic buildings. The final 2022-2023 budget allocated to Tennessee State included \$8 million toward maintenance, \$60 million for a new engineering building, and \$250 million for strategic initiatives, including the renovation and improvements of campus-wide infrastructure.

*“The plan is to fulfill the commitment that we’ve made to TSU, which is the largest and most historic funding commitment ever, \$250 million plus additional funding and we have worked together with TSU leadership to make certain that those funds are spent correctly... We have made a historic investment in Tennessee State University and the leadership there has worked with us and are pleased with that investment.”*

Governor Bill Lee



“Gov. Lee has taken a crucial step in highlighting the state’s commitment to our infrastructure needs, but more importantly to our students. His budget recommendation will enhance TSU, directly benefiting our faculty, staff, students, and all Tennesseans. This is a historic moment for TSU and our legacy. I am hopeful that lawmakers will help us build upon that legacy and be a part of it.”

[President Glenda Glover, Tennessee State University](#)

Additionally, in 2022 [HB 2293 and SB 2216](#) were passed unanimously, requiring Tennessee State University to submit an annual report detailing progress related to facilities and infrastructure. The report includes how improvements address the needs identified by the THEC Evaluation on Facilities and Infrastructure, shared in September 2021.

In closing, a review of the work to remedy systemic underfunding in Tennessee shows how long a journey it can be. This work did not start in the past decade, but rather has been a discussion since the inception of HBCUs. Where Tennessee found success was in garnering bipartisan support to discuss these

issues. Further, the inclusion of the Governor's office signaled to the state that this topic was a priority.

Further, Tennessee found success in ensuring discussions under remedying HBCU underfunding were focused on the future. Funding allocated in the 2022 legislation is used to ensure the sustainability of the future of Tennessee's HBCUs. Between capital improvements, strategic initiatives, and investments such as the new engineering building, Tennessee is charting a way to not only remedy underfunding, but ensuring that their HBCUs can continue to be economic drivers and successful institutions of higher education for generations to come.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a bipartisan legislative committee to discuss historic underfunding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as well as provide recommendations to remedy disinvestment.
- Inclusion of the Office of the Governor can signal state priorities, bolstering bipartisan legislative support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- Consider utilizing legislative avenues to remedy historic underfunding to avoid costly and time-consuming lawsuits.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Hunt Institute is grateful for the insight and guidance that our education policy partners provided for this issue brief. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to Lumina Foundation for their support of this series.



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