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Submitted by Anonymous on July 10, 2020 - 3:00am

In the face of the nation's current civil unrest in response to historic racial injustice and the continuing murder of black men and women at the hands of police, responsible institutional leadership of our colleges and universities should become directly engaged.

It is time for college and university governing boards to demonstrate their appropriate leadership by seizing this moment of public and political turmoil and assuming an appropriate role in affecting systemic change. The 50,000 men and women who serve on the governing bodies of colleges and universities should assert their ultimate authority as fiduciaries and leverage their individual and combined influence to strengthen the mandate for social progress. Faculty members and students at campuses across the country are engaged on the issues of racial justice. The voices of college and university presidents have become a growing force for change.

Unfortunately, higher education has had a checkered past when it comes to the rights of Black citizens. Some of our most historic institutions have, themselves, contributed to and benefited from racial injustice throughout their history and have helped to maintain the systemic societal racism that has been anathema to the nation since its founding. Institutions of higher education have at times engaged in and allowed many of the social, educational and economic practices that have actually perpetuated racism.

Our nation's college and university campuses, which enroll some 19 million students (14 percent of whom are African Americans), must actively engage in this national reckoning. Importantly, difficult national debates have in fact emanated across campuses throughout the country. America's colleges and

universities have also been engines of positive change and pathways to progress for our citizens and the world. Yet the absence of the voice of governing boards has too often dulled the full voice of institutions and limited the capacity of others to effect significant change.

Now it is time for the governing boards of our 3,000 campuses to be heard and to exercise their authority to spur action. The men and women who serve as board members are people of distinguished reputation and influence; they are respected and successful community and national leaders. As board members they hold ultimate authority for the policy decisions made by the institutions they serve. However, too often we have witnessed college and university governing board passivity when fundamental challenges, issues and risks confront their institutions and the society of which they are part. Passivity is neither leadership nor an acceptable strategy during this historic moment. It is time for sound and supportive leadership that only a fiduciary body can provide. It's not too late for these guardians of the nation's colleges and universities to demonstrate moral leadership in the midst of this national crisis.

Governing boards should develop, ensure implementation of and advocate on behalf of a formal board policy statement on racial inclusion and opposition to systemic racism. They need to address public safety and policing reform. And they should demonstrate a consistent commitment to an environment of trust and safety. Governing boards should leverage their unique position as a bridge between the institutions they lead and their states and communities.

A governing board policy statement on racial equity and justice might include some of the following to demonstrate an authentic voice and a commitment for change:

- The board will look at its own makeup and advocate for greater balance in its overall diversity and leadership.
- The board will ensure that meeting agendas include opportunities for learning and listening on issues of campus inclusion and implicit racial bias in the classroom and across the campus.
- The board will commit to strengthening their institution's relationship with external stakeholders in their community with the goal of creating a more just society.
- The board will require a periodic audit of all institutional policies and practices that impact diversity, inclusion and racial equity.

- The board will oversee a review of the institution’s past history, policies, practices and specific instances in which the institution has been complicit in racial inequities, and commit to a transparent airing of those situations and correcting policies that enabled past injustices.
- The board will instruct its institution’s academic leadership to review curriculum associated with law enforcement and other professional academic programs that are related to service to society, with an emphasis on developing training and education strategies that will contribute to a more just 21st-century model of policing and community support.
- The board will request that an assessment of the institution’s relationship with local and area police departments be undertaken and refreshed.
- And members of the governing board will commit to demonstrating racial and social justice policies and initiatives in their own businesses, including C-suites and corporate boardrooms, and their other voluntary engagements.

Martin Luther King said that “in the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

Now is the time for higher education’s governing boards to break their silence, elevate their role and lead.

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