



DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

August 4, 2026

The Honorable Christopher A. Coons (D-DE)
United States Senate
218 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coons:

On behalf of Delaware State University, I write to endorse the framework of the Protect College Sports Act of 2026. College athletics needs a national rulebook, and you and your colleagues have offered one. I associate the University fully with the letter Commissioner Sonja Stills submitted on behalf of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC), including its call for women's and Olympic sports protections that reach all of Division I.

One question stands above the rest. Section 122 is neutral on whether student-athletes are employees, leaving the answer to the courts and the NLRB. For HBCUs, neutrality is not neutral. Employee status would force our institutions to choose between meeting football's payroll and keeping women's soccer on the field. The Act should say affirmatively what our entire community has consistently raised: student-athletes are not employees. This remains the stumbling block for every HBCU, and I would trade nearly any other refinement for its resolution.

On Title III, I support what it does and object to what it is called. Broadband, campus technology, and broadcast-production grants are precisely where federal investment meets this market moment — our Battle of the Legends game last October with sister institution Norfolk State University drew 47,266 to Lincoln Financial Field. That game could not have been played on any HBCU campus in America, even though the demand is obvious. For Title III to do what it intends, it still needs three things:

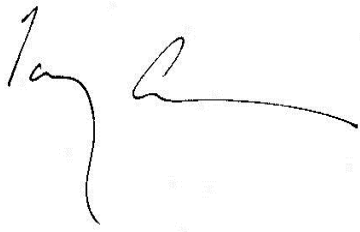
1. An authorization figure. Section 302 currently names none, and an unnumbered authorization cannot be evaluated — or appropriated. We recommend \$200–250 million annually, with the two-to-five-year grant terms as drafted.
2. Eligibility defined in the text to reach every accredited HBCU — public and private, Division I, Division II, and NAIA. A provision written for HBCUs should not leave the CIAA and SIAC outside it.
3. No matching requirement — or one the Secretary may waive. A 20 percent match would screen out the very campuses the program exists to reach.

But to be clear, I stand with Congresswoman Alma Adams (D-NC) on the name. IGNITE belongs to the IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act — the bill she and Representative French Hill (R-AK) carry in the House, and that you and Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) carry in the Senate — a bill neither Chairman Cruz (R-TX) nor Ranking Member Cantwell (D-WA) has co-sponsored. Both should add their names where the name belongs.

Attaching the IGNITE name to a single grant program while the whole bill sits in committee invites our community to mistake a down payment for the debt. The remedy is straightforward, and it would help: strike the IGNITE branding from Title III — whatever this Act does for HBCUs should stand on its own merits, and be just as robust — and implore the Act's authors, Chairman Cruz and Ranking Member Cantwell, to co-sponsor S. 4528 and commit to moving it whole. The full bill — campus and athletic facilities, specialty-program infrastructure like our aviation program, historic preservation, capital-financing relief — is the promise. I would welcome any of those provisions in this Act or in conference, as additions.

I am quite clear that you do not need persuading; you wrote the Senate bill. What I ask is that you carry this position onto the floor: pass the Protect College Sports Act with the employment question answered and the Title III provisions strengthened — and bring your colleagues onto IGNITE itself. The question is on the table again. Thank you for making sure we are in the room.

Together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Allen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tony Allen, Ph.D.
President