



September 1, 2020

The Honorable Chris Turner
Chair – House Committee on Higher Education
Texas Capitol E2.106

Chairman Turner,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's request for information regarding Interim Charge #2. Our responses are below. Please contact Kevin Crusier with any questions or concerns.

Interim Charge 2: Evaluate current and future capital infrastructure needs at Texas public universities, health-related institutions, and Texas State Technical Colleges in preparation for potential legislation to be considered by the 87th Legislature. Identify and evaluate alternatives to tuition revenue bonds for the State's funding of higher education capital infrastructure needs, including options for addressing deferred maintenance needs at aging campuses.

1. As a result of the pandemic, have institutions' infrastructure needs changed?

- Yes and No. The demand for physical space remains critical at Texas Woman's University. Texas Woman's University has experienced rapid growth in enrollment (95% since 2001). In recent years however, enrollment has been impacted by the lack of physical space for academics as well as student life, and additional investment by the state both in new TRB funding and HEF funding is more critical now than ever for continued and needed enrollment growth. Legislative support for construction of a new Science and Technology building in 2015 provided badly needed academic space and the impact of that new building led directly to other facility upgrades and increased academic space across campus. However even with those additions, academic space remains a premium, particularly as we have had to redesign both academic and non-academic space to provide in classroom opportunities while meeting CDC guidelines. TWU has converted multiple spaces such as ballrooms and meeting rooms in non-academic buildings for use as classrooms so that we can offer badly needed in person learning spaces while meeting CDC guidelines for social distancing.
- The impact of COVID-19 on our infrastructure needs has been tremendous. Technology upgrades in academic and non-academic spaces has been critical to serve our students. Higher Education Fund (HEF) dollars have been crucial to our ability to modernize and upgrade existing facilities for the digital age and to meet students' needs during the pandemic. For example, we have outfitted multiple parking structures and other non-academic spaces on campus with broadband Wi-Fi. Over 50% of TWU students are "Pell Eligible" and providing technology and internet access for those students has been and remains key to TWU's ability to serve our students during the pandemic. In addition, we have used federal and state aid money to help distribute laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots to students in need of technology. HEF funding remains critical to TWU's campus master

plan and revitalization of our historic campus and our ability to serve our students in a post COVID world.

2. How have institutions' needs changed since the 86th Legislature? Are there projects that were included in HB 2000 that are no longer needed; i.e., were funded through other means? Are there projects that were not included in HB 2000 that now are a need? If so, why?

- TWU's proposal for a new Health Sciences Center in HB 2000 is more badly needed than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a glaring spotlight on Texas' healthcare workforce shortages. TWU is a national and state leader in producing licensed healthcare workers and, as the 2nd largest Nursing PhD program in the nation, TWU produces over 25% of Nursing PhDs in Texas. The shortage of a nursing workforce is directly impacted by the even more acute shortage of Nursing PhDs. However, our health related expertise in nursing as well as PT, OT, and other health related programs is hindered by the lack of physical space for those programs to expand.
- The proposed Health Sciences Center in HB 2000 will not only directly increase the production of much needed licensed healthcare workers with TWU degrees; It will increase production of even more needed professors and educators that will then increase capacity exponentially in health related programs at institutions across the state.

3. If the pandemic has changed institutional needs, are there federal funds that could qualify to help offset COVID-related changes?

4. Has the economic recession impacted borrowing costs for a potential Tuition Revenue Bond? Are there any anticipated changes to the costs of borrowing in the future, should conditions remain as they are?

- Interest Rates are at historic lows and construction costs are also reduced. Legislative investment in Tuition Revenue Bonds would provide much needed investment in our academic institutions at historically low investment costs to the State of Texas. Furthermore, construction of new projects will provide jobs to Texas workers and stimulate the economy.

5. Are there financial or other benefits to paying for TRBs with cash rather than borrowing money?

- With interest rates at historic lows, financing TRBs over time is very attractive.

6. What kinds of longer-term impacts will we see to institutions if TRBs continue to be pushed off?

- At Texas Woman's University, we will struggle to grow enrollment and help Texas meet its workforce needs without additional academic space. We have already seen our enrollment growth limited by our limited academic space. Simply put, TWU's ability to grow enrollment in much needed healthcare fields will be significantly hindered without TRB funding for our Health Sciences Center.