

Legislation Text

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Urging the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to reverse its decision to place Cheyney University on probationary status and calling on the Commission to work collaboratively with the University's leadership to restore the historic HBCU's academic status.

WHEREAS, Founded in Philadelphia on February 25, 1837, as the Institute for Colored Youth, Cheyney University is the oldest of America's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Since its founding, Cheyney has provided educational opportunity for thousands of African-American students and played an invaluable role in expanding access to higher education in the United States; and

WHEREAS, On November 20, 2023, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), which is responsible for college and university accreditation in the mid-Atlantic region, placed Cheyney University on probationary status and indicated that the school's "accreditation is in jeopardy"; and

WHEREAS, Leaders in Pennsylvania have expressed their concerns with MSCHE's treatment of Cheyney University and raised serious questions regarding the Commission's procedures in making its determination. In a February 20, 2024 letter to MSCHE, Governor Josh Shapiro described the Commission's decision to place Cheyney on probationary status as "hasty and premature" and expressed his "disappointment with [MSCHE's] refusal to reevaluate [its] decision-making that led to placing the university on probation and [its] disregard of established procedure". And on February 23, 2024, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Chancellor Dan Greenstein stated that MSCHE's probationary accreditation decision "raises serious questions about the Commission's procedural fairness"; and

WHEREAS, Chancellor Greenstein has noted that "Cheyney University is engaged in one of the most remarkable turnarounds in U.S. higher education ever" and that the school's "hard work and dedication are showing up in measurable ways - in data on student enrollments, student progression, and the university's overall financial condition, all of which have improved over these past few years." Indeed, Cheyney has seen marked increases in student enrollment each year since 2019, including a 15% increase in first-year students in the current academic year; and

WHEREAS, Governor Shapiro and Chancellor Greenstein have stated that the leadership at Cheyney University has worked transparently and proactively with MSCHE to implement the Commission's recommendations made during the course of its review, and that Cheyney remains committed to working with MSCHE to ensure its compliance; and

WHEREAS, Cheyney University plays an invaluable role in Pennsylvania's system of higher education, providing opportunity for thousands of young people to learn and grow. The university is entitled to a fair and

transparent process in any decisions that impact its accreditation; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby urge the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to reverse its decision to place Cheyney University on probationary status and calls on the Commission to work collaboratively with the University's leadership to restore the historic HBCU's academic status.