

FORUM35

March 3, 2016

Honorable Members of the Louisiana Legislature
Louisiana State Capitol
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Dear Members:

Forum 35 is concerned about the mid-year reductions to Louisiana's higher education system and the Executive Budget reductions proposed in Fiscal Year 2016-17. These severe budget reductions occur on the heels of the largest divestment in higher education of any state in the nation. Failing to adequately support our higher education institutions hinders their ability to educate students, perform research, and provide a positive impact to our local economy. As a community of young men and women with over 600 members, Forum 35 strives to increase civic engagement and leadership development for the betterment of Baton Rouge. We believe that a comprehensive education serves as the foundation for success of Louisiana's future leaders.

The higher education institutions in the Baton Rouge area are a vital part of our community. According to a 2013 study, the LSU system supported nearly \$3.9 billion in Louisiana sales, \$1.5 billion in new statewide earnings and an estimated 36,757 direct and indirect annualized jobs. According to the Southern University System, Southern's institutions provide approximately \$539.5 million in economic impact to the state. In 2014-15, Louisiana's community and technical colleges completed a record year by graduating 21,292 students. 70% of the two-year system's graduates earned associate's degrees or industry based certifications in high-demand, high-wage fields in Louisiana. The University of Louisiana System has roughly 88,000 students enrolled statewide, and returns \$8 to Louisiana's economy for every \$1 invested in the system.

Today, our higher education system faces a "best case" scenario of approximately \$75 million in mid-year cuts and a "worst case" scenario of \$232 million. In addition, mandated costs the institutions pay back to the state have grown by over \$116 million since 2009 to a total of \$561 million. We believe further reductions would set our higher education system back decades and impede economic growth in the state. We hope you will consider the following points during the special and regular sessions:

- Ensure that higher education is a top priority for funding as revenue raising options are considered during the remainder of the special session.
- Continue efforts to ensure increased tuition and fee revenues are retained at each institution for reinvestment.
- Provide opportunities for higher education institutions to reduce mandated costs.
- Provide stable funding to Louisiana's higher education system to allow for long-term planning.

Forum 35 members look forward to working with you to better the Baton Rouge community and the state of Louisiana.

Sincerely,



Eric Dexter
President of Forum 35
On Behalf of the Forum 35 Board of Directors

CC: The Honorable John Bel Edwards, Governor of Louisiana.