MEMORANDUM

TO: The Howard University Community

FROM: Wayne A. I. Frederick, M.D., MBA
President

DATE: August 17, 2015

SUBJECT: Milestones

Earlier this month, the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that the 2011 Texas Voter ID law, requiring voters show authorized identification before being allowed to vote, carried a “discriminatory effect” and was a violation of Section 2 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Supporters of the Texas Voter ID law argued that the law protected against voter fraud. In reality it served as a tool to restrict voter access to cast a ballot in the state of Texas. Restricting someone’s ability to vote, to affect positive change in their community, not only violates an individual’s right to engage in the democratic process, but also dampens their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a better tomorrow.

As I watched these events unfold, in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, I thought about the obstacles and sacrifices of those who fought for the passage of the landmark law more than five decades ago; their dedication, commitment, and tireless work would have been in vain if discriminatory laws like the Texas Voter ID law were allowed to stand.

The anniversary of the Voting Rights Act and the federal court decision to overturn an unjust law are important. Not just because these decisions largely impact people of color, the elderly, and people in underserved communities. Rather, because as our fall semester begins, we welcome an incoming class of young people with their own hopes, dreams, and aspirations to fulfill.

Access to a quality education, like access to the ballot box, provides a pathway to realize not only ones’ potential, but to fulfill hopes and dreams for the future. Education, like the ballot box, is a great equalizer and Howard University continues to be a premier destination for those who seek to make a positive change in their lives, their communities, and the world.

Last weekend, we welcomed our largest incoming class of freshmen in nearly 30 years. The class of 2019 also represent some of the best and brightest young people our nation has to offer; presenting an average SAT score of 1114, an average ACT score of 24 and a 3.33 GPA!
So, why Howard? Given the academic prowess of our incoming freshman class, they are clearly high achievers and likely had their choice of postsecondary schools. I believe some students are attracted to Howard because of our history and legacy; some want to be a part of our ongoing advocacy for social justice and work to bring solutions to contemporary problems; some choose Howard because we are an internationally-recognized HBCU with an urban campus, based in our nation’s capital; for others it may be our internationally-recognized research; or, for the intellectually-stimulating and academically-challenging educational experience they’ll receive in any of our 13 schools and colleges. No matter the reason, Howard University students will receive an exceptional educational experience—second to none.

Our students, like the men and women who worked tirelessly for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, see the opportunity to make the world a better place for themselves, their communities, and the world. Howard University is the gateway to make those hopes, dreams, and aspirations a reality for our students today, and for generations to come.

I also want to make note of the recent passing of Mr. Julian Bond, a standard-bearer in the Civil Rights Movement and senior architect in the continuing fight for equality and justice for all people. The son of a college president, graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta, professor, author, poet, icon, and leader of a cultural movement, Horace Julian Bond symbolized a life dedicated to the service of others. While his life will be remembered and celebrated in the days and weeks ahead, we should never forget that Julian Bond leveraged his HBCU education and gave of himself for the benefit of others.

These milestones—the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, the incoming class of 2019, and the passing of Mr. Julian Bond—serve as gentle reminders of our struggles as a people and how far we’ve come in our journey to overcome them; but more importantly, these milestones should also remind us of the challenges before us and what’s possible when we leverage our knowledge, passion, and purpose to work together to overcome them.

To the class of 2019, welcome to the Capstone!