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Jimmy H. Baker
CHANCELLOR

April 5, 2021

The Honorable Bill Poole
Chairman
House Ways & Means Education Committee
Alabama State House, Suite 410-A
Montgomery, AL 36130

The Honorable Danny Garrett
Vice Chair
House Ways and Means Education Committee
Alabama State House, Suite 401-F
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Chairman Poole and Vice Chair Garrett:

I hope this letter finds you well. I want to first thank both of you for the recent opportunity you provided to me and my staff to present to the Ways & Means Education Committee on ACCS's budget priorities and our successes, challenges, and needs. I hope that our presentation was informative and helpful as the committee takes up the FY2022 Education Budget package.

My purpose for writing today is to share the Alabama Community College System's support of Senate Bill 215, the Connect Alabama Act of 2021, which is awaiting action by your committee. For months, the ACCS has been engaged in discussions on this legislation and have been pleased to be included within the Alabama University Research Alliance (AURA) that would be created by Senate Bill 215. We are excited about the possibilities that this bill can bring to our ACCS institutions and the citizens of the state of Alabama.

As you know, broadband access is perhaps the most important infrastructure challenge of the 21st Century. Access to broadband is becoming just as important as water, sewer, and highway access in the economic development decisions by business and industry to locate in certain areas of the state. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced our institutions to switch to completely online instruction, one of the most significant issues that our students faced, especially in rural parts of this state, based on feedback we've received was lack of adequate internet access at their homes. This resulted in frustration and discouragement for many students, some of which dropped out of classes and may never come back.

Attached with this letter you will find a map with all the locations of 2-year and 4-year institutions across the state that would be connected under the AURA plan. Not only would each institution benefit from increased broadband connectivity, but many students and families across Alabama will also be able to take advantage of greater access in their neighborhoods. By including Alabama's community colleges, more rural areas within Alabama will be included. It appears likely there will be opportunities for funding through potential federal resources in the near future, and Senate Bill 215 provides the structure and framework needed to pull this all together quickly once adequate funding is available.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 215 and for your continued support of Alabama's community colleges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jimmy H. Baker". The signature is stylized and written in cursive.

Jimmy H. Baker
Chancellor

Attachment

