January 19, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Biden,

We write to you on behalf of the alumnae of the 1957-1959 Tennessee A&I Tigers (now Tennessee State) men's basketball team, the first historically black institution to win a collegiate basketball national championship in 1957. This championship was followed up by winning titles again in 1958 and 1959. The Tennessee A&I Tigers were the first team in college basketball history at any level to win three consecutive national championships.

During their championship run, Dr. Richard “Dick” Barnett was a three-time All-American. The 1957 All-American honor marked the first time an African-American was ever named to the National All-American team. Dr. Barnett was also named Most Valuable Player of those title teams in 1958 and 1959. Along with Dr. Barnett, the remaining living members of the team include Assistant Coach Homer Wheaton and teammates George Finley, Jim Satterwhite, Ron Hamilton, Henry Carlton, and Ernie Jones.

The Tennessee A&I story is one of trailblazing courage from over sixty years ago that until recently had been buried in the underground railroads of America. As you are well aware, during the era of segregation, HBCUs like Tennessee A&I were often denied access to the same opportunities, resources, and recognition as predominantly white institutions. Discrimination and racial bias were obstacles that the Tigers had to confront on and off the field.

The Tennessee A&I teams led by legendary Hall of Fame coach John B. McLendon Jr. exhibited undying resiliency and determination in the face of intense racism. The team endured constant hate and death threats while traveling across the Jim Crow South in the 1950's.

After winning their first championship in 1957 against Southeast Oklahoma, they received a bomb threat on the plane shortly after takeoff from Kansas City back home to Nashville. After returning home safely, instead of celebrating their championship, they went directly to the A&P supermarket in downtown Nashville and staged a sit-in at the lunch counter. As exhilarating as it was to win, their priority was to stand up in the face of racism to further the civil rights movement.

After decades of being denied induction into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, part one of the Tigers' quest for recognition was finally successful. The team was proudly enshrined in the National Basketball Hall of Fame on Friday, September 6, 2019.

On the 65th anniversary of the Tigers’ first national championship, a powerful documentary, The Dream
Whisperer was released to wide acclaim. Eleven years in the making, the documentary chronicles the team’s historic success and the long and often frustrating journey to have The Tigers recognized for their achievements.

On behalf of all the Tennessee A&I Tigers, we respectfully request that an invitation to The White House be extended to the living members of the team for long overdue acknowledgment and proper celebration.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Scion of the Enslaved Africans - Sacrificed to Make America Great

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress
Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

Patrick K. Ryan
Member of Congress

Susan Wild
Member of Congress

Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress

Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

Dan Goldman
Member of Congress

Jared Golden
Member of Congress

Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress

Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress