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AGING AND LONG-TERM CARE
COMMUNICATIONS AND
CONVEYANCE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
VETERANS AFFAIRS

May 15, 2019

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The Honorable Rudy Salas, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Salas:

I respectfully request the Committee's approval of an audit of the University of California's (UC) admission policies and practices, including efforts to detect and address fraud in the admission process. Recent news reports have raised questions and concerns regarding whether college admission processes are fair and consistent with our ideals of meritocracy and diversity.

As my colleague Assemblymember McCarty recently pointed out in a letter to President Napolitano, "this kind of corruption—wealthy parents buying their children's college admission to a public-funded university—does nothing to build trust among taxpayers whose hard-working dollars fund our public higher education systems.... For every student admitted through bribery, there was an honest and talented student that was rejected, further perpetuating the income education gap that exists at our college education system." Anything that threatens or undermines our ideals of meritocracy and diversity, even if it's just a few corrupt individuals, rightfully concerns most Californians and their Legislature. I hope an audit can help restore confidence in our public institutions of higher education, and determine whether UC or the Legislature should make changes to ensure all admissions policies and practices ensure integrity.

Admissions Scandal

News articles over the last few months have reported on a nationwide scandal in which hundreds of individuals committed fraud to gain admission to some of the nation's top academic institutions. A company based in Newport Beach is at the center of this scandal. The wide-ranging allegations involve fabricated SAT scores, false claims of athleticism, deceptive photographs, and bribes paid to athletic coaches.

So far, two University of California campuses have been connected to the admissions cheating scandal. The longtime men's soccer coach at UCLA was indicted as part of the FBI's widespread

corruption investigation. He was charged with allegedly accepting $200,000 in bribes for facilitating the enrollment of one female student and one male student to the school under the pretense of being soccer players, even though they did not competitively play the sport. The allegation regarding the University of California Berkeley involved a parent paying to have someone take the SAT test in place of his son, who eventually was admitted to Berkeley.

Responses to Scandal

The UC seems to be responding appropriately to these allegations. UCLA placed the longtime men's soccer coach on administrative leave and publically stated that "the conduct alleged is deeply disturbing and in contrast with the expectations we have of our coaches to lead their teams with honesty and integrity." UCLA promised to conduct its own review and then decide what would be the proper steps to address the issue.

President Napolitano ordered an internal investigation into any UC involvement in the nationwide college admissions scandal. She pledged to take "swift and appropriate disciplinary actions to address misconduct once we have all the facts." Napolitano further stated "illegal, inappropriate and unethical means to gain admission, at the expense of deserving applicants, is antithetical to every aspect of our mission and values. As a public institution – one of the most highly regarded in the world – we are dedicated to ensuring a level playing field for every applicant."

Governor Newsom correctly connected this recent admissions scandal to the larger issue of economic inequalities. The Governor is correct when he says "it's a deeper issue than the bribery and holding these people to account, which they should be. It goes to the nature, again, of wealth. What about the legal bribery that exists in higher education? Do you think, seriously, does anyone think someone who writes a $100-million check to a university doesn't have a cellphone of someone who's influential."

Prior Admissions Audit

The State Auditor previously conducted an audit that touched on the UC's admissions process. The 2016 audit, which was requested by Assemblymember Gipson, found that the UC's enrollment of nonresidents had increased by 432 percent over the last nine years. Over the same period, the number of resident enrolled increased by only 10 percent. The report also found that the UC lowered admission standards for nonresidents and admitted nearly 16,000 nonresidents over the past three years with lower academic scores than the upper half of admitted residents. To fix these issues, the State Auditor made at least four recommendations to the UC. According to the State Auditor's website, none of these four recommendations have been fully implemented. The UC has partially implemented three of these recommendations. It decided not to implement the fourth recommendation.

Audit Scope

As a graduate of UC Berkeley, I am saddened by the recent scandal, but I am optimistic that an audit performed by the State's independent auditor can help assure Californians that the UC is doing all it can to ensure the meritocracy and diversity that we value. To that end, I request that the State Auditor conduct an audit with the following scope:

1. Review and assess UC system-wide policies and practices regarding admissions.

2. Review and assess the UC's admission policies and processes for the University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, and University of California San Diego.

    a. Identify, assess, and test fraud risks associated with the admissions process, including but not limited to potential fraud related to SAT, high school grades, essays, and student-athlete admissions.

    b. Identify the factors the UC considers when deciding which applicants are admitted to the three campuses.

    c. Determine the extent to which donations, "legacy" admissions, and influence factor into the admissions process. If they do, assess the diversity of the applicants admitted due to donations and influence.

    d. Determine the extent to which diversity is considered in the admissions process. Make any recommendations that would help increase any significantly underrepresented group while maintaining adherence to the state Constitution.

    e. Provide recommendations that may help minimize the risk of fraud in the admissions process.

3. Provide the following information regarding UC-eligible students admitted into the three campuses under UC's special admissions policy over the past three years, with a focus on students admitted through the identification of the special talent or achievement including, but not limited to, athletic or artistic talent or achievement.

    a. Identify how many students were admitted to each campus under this exception.

    b. Identify the categories under which the students were admitted.

c. Determine whether these students are still participating in the sport or activity that allowed them to be admitted under the exception.

d. Determine what is done to verify the eligibility for this exception during the admission process and whether there is a policy in place to ensure follow-up is done regarding the students' activities.

e. Assess whether the above data indicates any risk of fraud in admissions.

4. Review and assess UC and UC campus policies and practices regarding relationships between them and the College Board, ACT, and private admissions consultants.

5. Please perform the following work that is related to the audit report requested by Assemblymember Gipson titled *The University of California: Its Admissions and Financial Decisions Have Disadvantaged California Resident Students* (Report 2015-17).

   a. Perform a thorough review of the UC's efforts to implement State Auditor recommendations related to the admission of nonresident applicants.

   b. At the State Auditor's discretion, follow up on any other recommendations to the UC.

   c. Identify and assess trends related to the admission of nonresident and resident students to the three UC campuses since 2010-11.

Because the UC is currently conducting its own review, I ask that the State Auditor begin her audit after the UC finishes its review, or 6 months from the date the Committee approves this audit request, whichever occurs first. My hope is that the State Auditor's audit can benefit from the UC's own internal review. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff member, Rob Charles, at 916-319-2076.

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