FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

November 12, 2026

The Honorable Linda E. McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

A National Call to Action to University Presidents and Governing Boards

Dear Secretary McMahon:

As the nation celebrates its 250th, Francis Marion University recognizes the unique opportunity that we have for providing an exemplary education to our students and other constituencies.

In response to the National Call to Action to University Presidents and Governing Boards, we emphasize our commitment to transparency, affordability, academic rigor, workforce preparation, and community service. For the last five decades, these priorities have established the standards for teaching and research.

They also comprise the core of the university's mission statement, strategic plan, and shared governance processes. The latter affirms the importance of free expression, the open exchange of ideas, and the viability of campus debate, those values which we hold most dearly.

These imperatives establish our beliefs and guide our vision by ensuring that teaching, research, and the mentoring of students remain our paramount concern. In the most recent reporting year, faculty, staff, and students published 96 peer-reviewed chapters, articles, and poems, while supporting 57 performances, shows, and exhibitions. We are especially proud that the university provides more research funding per faculty member than any other college in South Carolina.

The National Call to Action addresses the importance of maintaining academic rigor as artificial intelligence and other technologies develop. FMU prepares students to use these tools responsibly while strengthening academic standards and developing the curiosity and independent judgment central to a college education. Technology may change teaching and learning, but meaningful student-faculty relationships will always be indispensable to this calculus.

To meet regional and state workforce needs, FMU has developed and expanded programs in the medical and health professions, education, engineering, business, social work, the humanities, arts, and social sciences. These programs combine didactic and clinical instruction with applied

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learning, ensuring that graduates are well prepared for demanding and rewarding careers. Our newest campus, the 8,355-acre Duck Ponds property, will further strengthen academic opportunities and serve as a living laboratory for teaching and research in forestry, environmental science, freshwater ecology, and ecotourism.

Affordability and access have been institutional priorities at FMU since the university's founding. In the last academic year, 89 percent of our 4500 students received financial assistance, more than 3,000 scholarships were awarded, and total student aid exceeded $91 million. FMU has held tuition steady for eight consecutive years. Our Premier Pledge program combines federal, state, and institutional resources to cover all freshman-year tuition for eligible in-state students who are first-generation or fully Pell-eligible. These efforts reflect our commitment to making the university accessible and affordable to everyone who aspires an education.

Service has also been part of FMU's identity. Named for Revolutionary War hero General Francis Marion, the university has prepared graduates who teach in public schools, earn military commissions, work with Teach for America, serve as missionaries among various faiths, and work with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. Since the university's founding, FMU graduates have served the most compelling causes and contributed to the greater good. They are extraordinary women and men.

In preparing this response, we have consulted with colleagues at other public universities across South Carolina. This statement has also been discussed with, and is supported by, FMU's 17-member Board of Trustees. The Board's support reflects a shared commitment to the university's mission and priorities outlined in this letter.

We appreciate this opportunity to share Francis Marion University's purpose and plans. We also recognize the challenges facing higher education and our responsibility to provide a comprehensive education to all of our students. This commitment is essential to everything we do. It is also a fundamental part of who we are.

Sincerely,

Luther F. Carter
President

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