



OFFICE OF  
THE PRESIDENT

## Tennessee State University

*Think. Work. Serve.*

**December 11, 2024**

**Dear Members of the Tennessee State University Tiger Family,**

It has been just over 120 days since I was honored to step into the role of Interim President of Tennessee State University. In that time, we launched the **Trajectory Change Initiative (TCI)**—a bold and comprehensive plan to address the university’s most pressing challenges and lay the foundation for a sustainable future. Together, we have made notable progress, including:

- **Securing emergency state funding** to avoid disruptions in order to meet payroll while implementing strategic cash management measures. The institution had a negative cash balance in August 2024 of more than \$18 million and overall deficit for FY25 of \$52 million.
- **Achieving \$13 million in annualized savings** through workforce realignments and expense reductions.
- **Strengthening transparency and trust** with stakeholders through public presentations, video addresses, frequent updates, and campus information sessions.
- **Recovering critical receivables**, including \$3.2 million owed to TSU.
- **Raising over \$500,000 through the “Close the Gap” campaign** to address student debt and support those striving to complete their TSU education.
- Supporting TSU’s fundraising efforts through my wife and I joining the **President’s Society Club (Deans Club level)**.

These accomplishments, among others (as part of my **100+-Days Progress Memo** sent to the board on December 9th), demonstrate that even in the face of significant challenges, TSU is capable of meaningful progress. However, as we prepare to move into the next and most critical phase of the TCI, it is with a heavy heart that I share with you my intention to tender my resignation to the Board of Trustees, effective Friday, December 13, 2024.

This decision is not made lightly. It has become apparent that there is a fundamental difference of perspective with the Board on how best to move this institution forward.

### **The TCI: A Plan to Save TSU**

The **Trajectory Change Initiative (TCI)** was designed as more than a framework—it is the comprehensive plan to save TSU and sustain it as a future-ready institution. The next phase of the TCI was intended to focus on creating a financial model to:

- Align expenditures with sustainable revenue streams.

- Stabilize enrollment and rebuild recruitment and retention strategies.
- Guide academic restructuring to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
- Maximize the value of TSU's resources, partnerships, and assets.

This model represents a clear and actionable path forward that could place TSU on the right financial and structural track within a couple of years. In my professional opinion this is a thoughtful, broad-based approach to secure TSU's future and its ability to serve its students and fulfill its mission.

### **Why TSU Matters**

I came to Tennessee State University because I believe deeply that **TSU matters**. It is not just an institution of higher learning; it is a beacon of opportunity, innovation, and equity. TSU transforms lives, strengthens communities, and drives progress in Tennessee and beyond. As the state's only public HBCU, TSU is a vital social impact institution that bridges the gap for first-generation students, underserved populations, and all those seeking a brighter future. In addition, TSU has a dedicated faculty who have worked tirelessly with me to change the trajectory. Also, I have had the pleasure of engaging with the many alumni and other stakeholders who deeply care about saving this institution.

### **Gratitude and Farewell**

To the TSU community—students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters—thank you for your resilience, your dedication, and your passion. Your unwavering commitment to this university is what makes TSU truly extraordinary.

As I step away from this role, I remain hopeful and confident that TSU can overcome its challenges. The road ahead will be difficult, but with the right leadership, collaboration, and vision, TSU will continue to thrive as an institution that truly matters—not just to Tennessee, but to the nation and the world.

It has been an honor to serve you during this critical moment in TSU's history. Together, we have started the journey toward a stronger, sustainable, and future-ready TSU.

With respect and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ronald A. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Ronald A. Johnson, PhD**  
Interim President  
Tennessee State University