March 27, 2015

Howard University Community,

I want to advise you of the passing of our dear friend and Board of Trustee Chairwoman Emerita, Dr. Floretta Dukes McKenzie.

Dr. McKenzie died Monday, March 23, 2015, in Silver Spring, MD. She was 79.

As many of you know, after more than 40 years of dedicated service as an educator and thought-leader, Dr. Floretta Dukes McKenzie dedicated her life to academic excellence and continuously undergirding the foundation of the public school system to help others leverage the benefits of a quality education. She was a tireless supporter and advocate of Howard University and a venerable leader in the U.S. education system.

Born in Lakeland, Florida, Floretta Lillian Dukes and her family moved to the Washington, DC area when she was a child. After graduating from Washington’s Dunbar High School in 1952, Dukes went on to graduate from D.C. Teachers College in 1956. She received her master’s degree in education at Howard University in 1957, and a doctorate in education from George Washington University in 1985.

From 1973 to 1998, Dr. McKenzie served the D.C.-area school systems and U.S. Department of Education in a variety of leadership positions, including deputy superintendent, Washington, DC Public School System; area assistant superintendent, Montgomery County schools; deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Education; and Superintendent and chief state school officer for the District of Columbia public schools.

During her tenure as superintendent of D.C. public schools, the nation’s twenty-first largest school system, managing 89,000 students, 13,000 employees and a $400 million budget, Dr. McKenzie was a staunch advocate for a competency-based criteria for academic advancement. As superintendent, Dr. McKenzie launched a variety of district-wide initiatives to help students receive a quality education, including summer school programs to help struggling students advance, retooling primary school curricula to help increase elementary school achievement scores, and she has been widely credited with helping Banneker High School graduate its first graduating class during her tenure. Under her leadership, the district also established several public and private partnerships to improve instructional programs and district management. Dr. McKenzie oversaw the implementation of the Five-Year Computer Literacy Plan, one of the country’s first long-range programs for integrating technology into the public school curriculum.
In 1988, after many years of dedicated service to the public school system, Dr. McKenzie formed the McKenzie Group, an educational consulting firm with special emphasis on urban education.

Dr. McKenzie later served as senior advisor for the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC and founder and chairwoman of the McKenzie Group, Inc.

In addition to serving as Howard University Board of Trustees chairwoman for two years and vice chairwoman for ten years, Dr. McKenzie also served on the boards of Friendship Public Charter School; Marriott International; National Geographic Society; PEPCO; CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield; and Acadia Mutual Life Insurance. Additionally, she was a member of the White House Historical Association and the Johns Hopkins Leadership Development Program. She also served as a senior advisor for the American Institutes for Research and served as a delegate to the UNESCO General Conference in Yugoslavia.

Widely-known, admired and respected for her commitment to education and service to others, Dr. McKenzie was frequently recognized and honored by her friends, peers, and colleagues in education, the private sector and public service communities, including Presidential Honoree from the National Bar Association; a Leadership Award for Education and Service to Youth, from The Links, Incorporated, Capital City Chapter; and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Howard University School of Education.

Arrangements for visitation and memorial service for Dr. McKenzie are pending. Additional information will be shared once details have been confirmed.

Please join me in extending our deepest sympathies to Dr. McKenzie’s family, friends, and colleagues for their loss and thank her for her many tireless years of dedication, commitment and service to education, Howard University, and all who knew her.

In Truth and Service,

Wayne A. I. Frederick, M.D., MBA
President