

**African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey
Launches #STEPUP20 Scholarship Program
--Funds will help students whose education depends on summer income --**

Trenton, NJ – July 21, 2020, With the COVID-19 pandemic impacting nearly every job and employer in New Jersey many students who rely on a summer job or internship to help pay for college are suddenly facing the prospect of not being able to afford a return to school this fall. The African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey (AACCNJ) announced today that with a founding donation of \$10,000 from Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ, it was launching an effort to recruit 20 corporate partners to fund a \$100,000 scholarship program aimed at helping impacted young black male and female students replace lost summer income so that they can continue their education.

“For students from traditionally under-served communities, college can be a critical path to economic and social empowerment. While many benefit from financial aid or scholarships that cover much of the cost of college, the reality for most is that those programs typically require a student to contribute something toward the total cost and many count on a summer job or internship to earn that money,” said John E. Harmon, Sr. AACCNJ’s Founder, President, and CEO.

To help these students, AACCNJ has created a scholarship program that will offer grants of up to **\$2,000.00** to students from New Jersey who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Interested students can apply through the application found at <https://app.pedul.com/>. Pedul is an online platform created by two former Rutgers University students that allows students to apply to thousands of local and national scholarships with a single application. “We are extremely excited about this opportunity to partner with these amazing young leaders to execute this scholarship program. These scholarships will fill a critical gap by providing students unrestricted resources to cover their share of the costs and continue investing in their future. Horizon has always been a good partner for us and their willingness to step up again and help lead this effort reflects their commitment to the people and communities of our state,” Harmon continued.

“Horizon is New Jersey’s health insurer and for nearly 90 years, it has been part of our mission to help improve the health of our communities. The connection between education and health has been clearly established and we know that people with college degrees have fewer chronic health conditions and are generally healthier than those who do not. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for everyone, and it remains our priority to be there for our members and our home state when they need us most,” said Jonathan Pearson, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility for Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey.

Harmon has begun an outreach effort to identify 19 additional companies willing to donate to the scholarship fund. Anyone interested in learning more about the Chamber or the scholarship program can contact John Harmon at Jharmon@aacnj.com or by calling the AACCNJ at (609) 571-1620.

About African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey

The AACCNJ performs an essential role in the economic viability of New Jersey. While providing a platform for New Jersey’s African American business leaders, to speak with a collective voice, the AACCNJ advocates and promotes economic diversity fostering a climate of business growth through major initiatives centering on education and public policy. The Chamber serves as a proactive advocacy group with a 501(c) 3 tax exemption, which is shared by the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

About Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, the state’s oldest and largest health insurer is a tax-paying, not-for-profit health service corporation, providing a wide array of medical, dental, vision and prescription insurance products and services. Horizon BCBSNJ is leading the transformation of health care in New Jersey by working with doctors and hospitals to deliver innovative, patient-centered programs that reward the quality, not quantity, of care patients receive. Learn more at www.HorizonBlue.com. Horizon BCBSNJ is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association serving approximately 3.4 million members.