Sen. requests diversity funds

Democrat Peter Groff sends letter to CU leaders

By Britanny Anas
Camera Staff Writer

State Sen. Peter Groff, D-Denver, sent a letter Tuesday to the University of Colorado's president and chancellor urging them to spend $5 million in the next five years on diversity programs.

A student coalition working to improve race relations on campus first made the funding request last week.

Groff, in his letter, said the $5 million should be spent to retain and recruit minority students, as well as tenure-track faculty of color. The funds should also go toward programs that improve the campus climate.

A black student government leader received a profane e-mail threatening her life two weeks ago. A CU football player received similar e-mail messages last school year, and there have been several other racially biased incidents reported on campus in the past two semesters.

The letter Groff sent to CU President Hank Brown and Chancellor Phil DiStefano also proposes the university hire an outside firm to review its programs, make recommendations and develop long-term strategies to deal with racism and a lack of diversity on campus. The firm should also oversee the implementation of the strategies, Groff said in the letter.

Groff also requests that a Blue Ribbon commission charged with evaluating CU's diversity system begin meeting within the next two months. CU President Hank Brown announced his plan to create the task force at a regents meeting in August. A CU spokeswoman has said its members should be selected and begin meeting by the beginning of January.

"In light of recent acts of racism, now is the time to take charge of the situation and lay a substantive foundation to deal with diversity at our flagship University," said the letter written by Groff, senate president pro tem.

University of Colorado Tri-Executive Jeremy Jimenez said he appreciates Groff's support.

"I'm really glad to see somebody from the Legislature step up and make a statement," Jimenez said Tuesday.

Jimenez is working with a coalition of campus leaders to improve diversity on campus. The coalition includes student government leaders, campus representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Shoulder 2 Shoulder — a group that promotes diversity.

The student leaders met with DiStefano on Monday for a closed-door discussion.

DiStefano could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Jimenez said the coalition will continue meeting with administrators, and he said CU officials said that by January they should be able to give the students a better idea about how much additional money will be available for diversity programs and scholarships.

Contact Camera Staff Writer Britanny Anas at (303) 473-1132 or anasb@dailycamera.com.