



Maryland Community College Chief Student Affairs Officers

An affinity group of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges

Appropriations Committee

House Bill 475

Supporting Testimony

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Community College Chief Student Affairs Officers

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 475, a bill to support students with disabilities at Maryland's community colleges. Thanks to the sponsors of this bill for your concern about students with disabilities, and for all the support you provide to Maryland's community colleges.

I serve as the chairperson for the Maryland Community College Chief Student Affairs Officers Affinity Group, the higher education officers that are in part responsible for making sure that students with disabilities receive a quality education and the services and support they need to be successful. Each of us witnesses the struggles that these students work through to succeed in college, and we take pride in seeing many students with disabilities complete their educational goals each year.

The February 2019 Maryland Higher Education Commission report on Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities states that 7,837 students with a disability attended Maryland's 16 community colleges in fiscal year 2017. This amount is 52.6% of all undergraduate students with disabilities at Maryland's public four-year institutions, state-aided independent institutions and community colleges.

Community colleges are clearly a place that students with disabilities choose to start their college education. At my small community college on the Lower Eastern Shore, Wor-Wic Community College, we have 94 students with disabilities this year pursuing their dream of a college degree. At our 2019 commencement ceremony, Samantha Davis, a student with autism gave the commencement address for her class. Samantha graduated with a degree in our hotel-motel-restaurant program and has dreams of opening her own bakery. During her commencement address she was profuse in her thanks of our disability services counselor and the support that she received at Wor-Wic in order to complete her degree. Samantha is just one example of the successes our community colleges produce when working with students that require assistance to complete their education.

Supporting students as they complete their higher education objectives is rewarding, but it comes with a cost to community colleges. While community colleges do not create Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities like those required in secondary schools, we must provide students with disabilities reasonable accommodations to assist them in their education. Reasonable accommodations are unique to each student and their disability, and examples include sign language interpreters, readers, converting printed materials to braille, tutors, note takers and specialized software.

In addition, each community college staffs an office of employees to provide reasonable accommodations to these students and to help them overcome barriers to success during their time with us. The cost for meeting the needs of students with disabilities at Maryland's community colleges totals over \$5.3 million annually. This amount does not include funds spent by our institutions to provide state-mandated tuition waivers for students with disabilities.

This important legislation would provide a grant program of \$2.5 million in the state's annual budget to help community colleges meet the needs of students with disabilities. The General Assembly enacted legislation in 2006 requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to establish a grant fund for community colleges to support students with disabilities. There has been no funding since fiscal year 2009, and in the decade since then the number of students and the support needed to ensure their success has grown.

Assisting community colleges with support services that we are required to provide would greatly enhance our ability to serve these students. Students with disabilities are choosing community colleges to start their education because we provide a small, student-centered environment that helps all students overcome barriers to educational success. As the leading provider of higher education services to students with disabilities in Maryland, it is vital that we have the resources to meet the needs of this growing population.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation. You have been leaders in efforts to make community colleges places where students can start their college education and can attain the skills and education needed to compete in a 21st century workforce. I urge a favorable report of this bill so that community colleges can effectively support our citizens with disabilities as they strive to complete their education and become part of Maryland's workforce.