



House Appropriations Committee

Testimony: HB 475 – Community Colleges-Students with Disabilities

Testimony Submitted by: Dr. Kathleen Hetherington, President, Howard Community College

Position: Support

February 11, 2020

Thank you for allowing me to speak today about House Bill 475, which would be instrumental in supporting the increasing needs of community college students with disabilities. I appreciate Delegates Cain, Guyton and Mosby for sponsoring this bill.

Community colleges are open-access higher education institutions. We are not selective admissions institutions, and our colleges do not shut students out. Rather, we welcome and serve every student who has a desire to learn. We meet them where they are and work with them to achieve their educational goals.

In serving such a diverse student body, we must meet their diverse needs in order to help them succeed in the classroom. Our students with disabilities require a wide range of services, and the costs to provide such services have grown significantly over the years, now reaching more than \$5 million annually for Maryland's 16 community colleges. Since the students we serve vary from year to year, so too do the costs to provide them with the appropriate services to meet their unique needs. This fluctuation creates budgetary strain, as it is challenging to plan ahead and predict how to most accurately allocate resources for our students.

Colleges provide sign language interpreters, tutors and note takers, as well as the resources necessary to convert printed materials to Braille. At times, we may also need to purchase specialized software to accommodate students' individualized learning needs.

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges supports House Bill 475 because it would provide much-needed budgetary support by allocating an annual appropriation of \$2.5 million starting in fiscal year 2022, and each fiscal year thereafter, to assist community colleges in providing important services and accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

At Howard Community College, the costs for accommodations for students with disabilities has been rising. In fiscal year 2018, our operating costs to serve approximately 800 students with disabilities totaled \$615,107. In fiscal year 2019, over 900 students with disabilities were

served, costing the college \$682,428. The increasing number of students needing accommodations, coupled with the always growing costs to our operating budgets, is unsustainable. Governor Hogan's fiscal year 2021 proposed budget increase for community colleges was cut by fifty percent through the Budget Reconciliation and Finance Act (BRFA) of 2020. If the state wants community colleges to provide services to students that are equitable and inclusive, it needs to make sure that community colleges have the necessary financial support to pay for the personnel, equipment and related services to do so.

Maryland's community colleges ask legislators to support House Bill 475. Assistance with these expenditures would greatly support our ability to serve our students and help stabilize Maryland's community colleges' operating budgets.