

Community College Students with Disabilities Deserve Meaningful Access

Position Statement in Support of House Bill 475

Given before the House Appropriations Committee

Maryland established the Community College Learning Disabilities Initiative in 2006 to provide services and supports that can help students with disabilities succeed in the state's community colleges. However, policymakers never committed to providing a minimal level of support to the program, and have not funded it at all since 2009. The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 475, which would require the state to devote at least \$2.5 million to the program annually.

More than 7,700 students with disabilities were enrolled at Maryland community colleges during the 2015–2016 academic year.ⁱ Colleges are required to provide certain accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act to guarantee meaningful access to higher education, but research shows that many students do not get the support they need. A study published by the U.S. Department of Education found that nearly one-quarter of postsecondary students who identify themselves as having a disability do not inform their institution of their disability, the first step in requesting an accommodation.ⁱⁱ A 2016 study identified a range of barriers that prevent students from using accommodations, including burdensome administrative procedures and a perception that accommodations should be reserved for students with greater needs.ⁱⁱⁱ

House Bill 475 would provide additional resources that would allow community colleges to better serve students with disabilities. Colleges could use this funding to provide additional services and supports beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, including outreach and support to help students access other services to which they are currently entitled. A robust system of supports is essential to make good on Maryland's promise to provide all students the educational foundation they need to succeed.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Appropriations Committee make a favorable report on House Bill 475.

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 475

Bill Summary

House Bill 475 would provide funding to allow community colleges to better serve students with disabilities. Colleges could use this funding to provide additional services and supports beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Background

Colleges are required to provide certain accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act to guarantee meaningful access to higher education, but research shows that many students do not get the support they need. Maryland established the Community College Learning Disabilities Initiative in 2006 to provide services and supports that can help students with disabilities succeed in the state’s community colleges. However, policymakers never committed to providing a minimal level of support to the program, and have not funded it at all since 2009. House Bill 475 would require the state to devote at least \$2.5 million to the program annually.

Equity Implications

Individuals with disabilities enroll in college at half the rate of people without disabilities and graduate at lower rates. As a result, individuals with disabilities are often unemployed or underemployed and are more likely to live below the poverty level. Moreover, when enrolled in college, individuals with disabilities face complex barriers that reduces their likelihood of success.

Having additional supports available could remove barriers and make it more likely that students with disabilities will complete their degrees.

Impact

House Bill 475 would likely **improve disability equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ “Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities,” Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2018, <https://mhec.state.md.us/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2017ReportonStudentswithDisabilitiesatMarylandCollegesandUniversities.pdf>

ⁱⁱ MDCEP calculation based on Lynn Newman, Mary Wagner, Anne-Marie Knokey, Camille Mardner, Katherine Nagle, Debra Shaver, and Xin Wei, “The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School,” National Center for Special Education Research, 2011, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Lyman, Mark Beecher, Derek Griner, Michael Brooks, John Call, and Aaron Jackson, “What Keeps Students with Disabilities from Using Accommodations in Postsecondary Education? A Qualitative Review,” *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 29(2), 2016, http://www.ahead-archive.org/uploads/publications/JPED/jped292/JPED%2029_2_FullDocument.pdf#page=20