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Testimony

HB1260 – Historically Black Colleges and Universities - Funding

Appropriations

February 25, 2020

Support

AFSCME Council 67 supports HB 1260. This bill establishes the Historically Black College and Universities Reserve Fund and requires the Governor, in fiscal years 2022 through 2031, to include additional annual State operating funds. The bill also requires that the Maryland Higher Education Commission to establish new units to assist in evaluating and reviewing proposal for new programs and substantial modifications of existing programs.

For the past 13 years, the State of Maryland has been a defendant in a lawsuit brought by a coalition representing former, current, and prospective students at Maryland's HBCUs alleging that policies of the State's higher education system are in violation of federal law. After a federal District Court found in part for the coalition, there has been no final resolution of the case. If the parties do not reach an agreement, the case will move back to the federal appeals court for further litigation.

We believe properly resourcing the HCBUs can work in coordination with Maryland's efforts at improving and enhancing the state's overall education offerings. For example, a core component of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations includes recruiting, supporting and retaining high quality teachers, and paying them accordingly. Furthermore, the state faces a teacher shortage, particularly among minority teacher applicants. Both Coppin State University and Bowie State University have schools of education that, with an infusion of resources, could serve as a pipeline to address these teacher shortages while enhancing their own institutional standing. Other programmatic offerings at HBCUs in criminal justice, gerontology, urban environment, cybersecurity and avionics – to name a few – would not only address identified challenges the state faces in the 21st century but would also serve as institutional enhancements and attractions that apply for potential students of all races.

Providing for the HBCUs remediation can and should be done in cooperation and coordination with already-existing programs at Maryland's Institutions. There is significant opportunity to expand and enhance programs at the HCBUs while legitimately analyzing and negotiating solutions to any mutually identified program duplication. It should be noted that Salisbury University and the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore have worked diligently to address duplicative efforts in order to enhance each institution's offerings.

Significantly investing in Maryland's HBCUs should not be looked at as only addressing past wrongs to be righted. Investing \$1 billion over ten years should be viewed as a wise and strategic resource deployment that will bring positive returns for all Marylanders, because we are investing in our greatest resource: our people. To meet the challenges of the 21st century, it is investments such as these that will allow Maryland to once again claim the mantle of "#1" in education nation-wide and serve as a beacon for all to follow.

For these reasons, we urge a favorably report on HB 1260.