



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

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Testimony before the Maryland House Appropriations Committee  
HB 511 - Institute for Public Leadership - Establishment  
February 15, 2022  
Favorable

As the dean of the University of Maryland School of Public Policy, and having spent much of my career serving in government and intergovernmental organizations, I have seen first hand how important and consequential effective public leadership is for the health and wellbeing of our society. We stand at a moment where this is ever apparent. Public leaders at all levels, both elected and appointed officials, have been shouldering the response to a public health emergency with direct and significant impacts to the lives and livelihoods of their citizens. These same leaders are facing increasingly complex challenges that require new capabilities and capacity, standing on the front lines of a changing climate, inequity and injustice, cyber threats, challenges to democracy, and critical demand for services.

Yet at the same moment when our need for effective public leadership is greatest, the high calling of public service is being drowned out both by attacks on the public trust and by alluring shouts of other opportunities. The breakdown of civil discourse and ever-increasing hyper-partisanship and gridlock are tarnishing public service. Many of our students are seeing it as a bruising, costly endeavor with few opportunities to effectively solve issues and deliver benefits to communities. Conversely, they are being drawn by the siren call of the private sector's substantial benefits, and increasingly purpose-driven orientation, and the nonprofit sector's hands-on orientation and innovation. Our students and alumni remain tenaciously idealistic, and we are seeing very strong demand for careers advancing the public good, but people are increasingly choosing pathways outside of public service to do so.

This is why your support of an Institute for Public Leadership in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland is both timely and consequential. The ability to strengthen the pathway into public leadership, and the journey along it throughout a career, is critical to re-establishing leadership in the public sector as an accessible, impactful opportunity worthy of pursuit by our "best and brightest" from all backgrounds and walks of life. Elements of this pathway exist in what we currently do, but an institute provides much needed structure to cohere,

sustain, and expand learning and training programs, and better support aspiring and current public leaders. As effective public leadership education and training relies on robust experiential learning, including bringing students to places of practice such as Annapolis, and bringing practitioners to students, the infrastructure and resources of an institute will be critical to scaling opportunities to meet the demand for careers serving the public good.

The University of Maryland School of Public Policy has a long history of championing and delivering public leadership development, both for students in our degree programs and for professionals through executive development programs. We graduate approximately half our class each year into public service roles in local, state, and federal government, and many alumni of our academic and executive programs hold elected positions and high-level appointments in public agencies. Public service, and the importance of the public sector as a platform from which to serve, is at the heart of who we are as a School. We also benefit from the ability to share this public service ethos and skill set across the breadth and depth of expertise on the College Park campus, reaching into the science and technology, and the business and management disciplines whose insights and graduates will be increasingly central in challenges faced by public leaders. Public policy is interdisciplinary, and we prepare leaders for it.

An Institute for Public Leadership stands to be a strong resource in support of our responsibilities to the citizens of the state as a flagship and land-grant institution. The state and local governments of Maryland are nationally recognized for providing innovative and high-quality services to the people of Maryland. We are looked to as a model of best practice across a range of topics including education, environmental protection, and economic development. The strength of our governments rely on the people who serve within them and those elected to lead them, and maintaining this excellence will require us to attract the strongest and most motivated students in the state to careers in public leadership. It demands that we champion public leadership as an accessible and inclusive opportunity, supporting those who are under-represented in these positions to contribute their skills and experience. It requires strengthening professional development opportunities at all stages of public leadership careers, so that we retain people and best equip them for new challenges. It also behooves us to maintain and project our position and identity here in Maryland as a center of eminent example of public leadership excellence and a resource to others throughout the country.

The mission of the Institute for Public Leadership as specified in this bill is one that the School of Public Policy is very well-positioned to deliver. The Institute will make a significant contribution to our ability to develop a pipeline of diverse, effective public leaders to serve the state both locally and nationally through experiential learning that is grounded in real-life practice. It will leverage the expertise and experience of our current public leaders to develop this next generation, as well as support their own development as the demands of public

leadership expand in scale and complexity. We are grateful for your consideration of this legislation and for the opportunity to strengthen our efforts in service of the people of Maryland and we urge a favorable report.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert C. Orr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a stylized 'Orr'.

Robert Orr  
Dean and Professor, School of Public Policy  
University of Maryland, College Park