



Screenwriting and Animation (SWAN) Program Cinematic Arts and Sciences

Monday February 20, 2023

Chair Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, 3W
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB452-SUPPORT

Dear Chair, Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,
As the director of the Screenwriting and Animation (SWAN) Program at Morgan State University, I have a stake in the support of SB452 for undergraduate and graduate students in our cinematic arts curriculum which emphasizes storytelling and applied practice. This is the same position that my colleagues at other film schools and film programs in the region vigorously support for their majors. Whether at MICA, Bowie, Towson, Johns Hopkins University, Stevenson, or UB and UMBC, higher ed faculty recognize the importance and the advantage to our students of the regional presence of the film and television business outside of our institutions, as opposed to a neighboring state, or Atlanta, New Orleans, Florida, or the West Coast.

Access is pivotal for students already meeting challenges for paying tuition, only to be faced with travel and housing expenses to gain experiences that are vital to their career paths in industry. SB452 provides the advantages of local opportunities for access to internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level work across a scale of productions from independent and studio films to broadcast and streaming TV series, to microbudget indies that are a spawning ground for filmmakers and animators. By enhancing the Maryland Film Production Activity Tax Credit, the state is further attracting film and television productions to Maryland with no upfront funding, only a rebate after production is completed, money is spent, and qualified spending approved through an audit and tax return.



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SB452 will create more jobs and increase revenue to the state and small businesses. At the same time, SB452 enhances student opportunities for exposure to the levels of the collaborative workflow of actual productions and advantages their access without major collateral expenses for travel and housing. It makes it more likely that these students with powerful and transferrable skillsets will remain a vital resource for Workforce MD, thereby building their careers, entrepreneurship, and future businesses from this region.

Recently I had the opportunity with SWAN undergraduate majors to participate in a director's shadow with MFA students from MICA as well. We were invited to the Baltimore set of Apple Entertainment's period drama "Lady in The Lake," based on the book by Laura Lippman. It was mind blowing for our students to spend time with the director, set director, costume director, director of photography, and to be greeted by the star Natalie Portman as she prepared to shoot a scene in a downtown Baltimore market restored to its sixty's splendor. The knowledge obtained from the exposure was undeniably a bird's eye view of the collaborative nature of the studio industry and the small army of departments that it takes to make a major motion picture. It was even more gratifying to see SWAN alumni among the union crew working on the project in various capacities.

Over the past year, my students have worked on projects ranging from Paramount's TV series "Lioness," to Fox Motion Pictures with Lee Daniels Productions "Spook Who Sat by the Door," to Lifetime Television's "Safe Space," with director Boris Kodjoe, and star Nicole Ari Parker. We have had student PAs and alumnae work on the HBO/ Blown Deadline Production, "We Own This City" with Nina Noble and David Simon. Students have also gained the opportunity at Outlook Animation Studios (OVFX), Baltimore, to gain experience on a 2D/3D animation pipeline without leaving the state. This opportunity has led to students hired by OVFX as animators, storyboard artists, and game designers.



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For SWAN, SB452 converges with a time like none other in the history of the motion picture television industry in a period of where inclusion and diversity has become a major theme for industry due to social movements and the evolution of business modeling and audience composition. Let's not miss this important window to reinforce SB452 to benefit all higher educational programs within the state of MD.

Respectfully,

Keith Mehlinger, MFA

Founding Director, Screenwriting and Animation (SWAN) Program

Gilliam College of Liberal Arts

Morgan State University



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