



**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**Senate Bill 1022**

**Maryland Higher Education Commission - Academic Program Approval and Institutional  
Mission Statements - Requirements**

**March 26, 2024**

**Favorable**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the committee, thank you for allowing the University System of Maryland (USM) the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 1022.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of University USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

The University System of Maryland, represented by the Board of Regents and the Chancellor, set the goal of becoming the preeminent university system in the nation. It's essential to that mission that our presidents and faculty are able to develop and evolve programs that keep our institutions on the forefront of their fields and nimbly respond to the needs of our state's employers.

Senate Bill 1022 would create a sorely needed collaboration fund that will enable faculty across the state to partner in ways that benefit multiple institutions at once. In addition, the priority placed on institutional missions will outline what each school contributes to the state, what makes it distinct, and its plans for the future.

The bill emphasizes statewide, cross-cabinet effort – including dedicated staff – to forecast workforce needs will help direct the energies of our faculty and elevates workforce needs in the state higher-education plan, including identifying future academic programs, will help us all row in the same direction. Additionally, there are many other provisions that protect online degree programs serving mostly out-of-state students.

The USM hopes that, in continued deliberations, the legislation will make **didactically** clear that if an institution proposing a program has faithfully adhered to the letter and spirit of the process, then its proposal will have the presumption of approval. That is, if the proposal aligns with the approved state plan, addresses workforce needs, and fits its institution's approved mission, and if the institution has filed its letter of intent, addressed responses to its letter of intent, sought collaboration, and met all application requirements, then the proposal should be presumed acceptable.

The hopeful outcome is that the statute and regulations will deem proposals to be non-duplicative—or deem them as presenting a “sound educational justification”—if they align with the approved state plan and the institution’s approved mission. That would mean that the institution is working in its designated focus area and that the state has significant workforce needs in that field. In such cases, employment demand for the program would support multiple institutions engaging in this work. Importantly, any other factors leading to an “unnecessary” or “unreasonable” determination are narrow and clear so our institutions can fully consider and respond to such concerns.

USM is part of a team. We are in this together with our partners in K-12 education, community colleges, the state’s other public universities, private universities, and career schools. And while we represent 12 of our state’s 14 public four-year institutions, we want all of Maryland’s schools to succeed. They are our friends and colleagues. Our state is strongest when all of our institutions thrive and when all of our students can find post-secondary options that match their hopes and needs.

Each of the state’s institutions contribute something special to Maryland higher education, and the workgroup and sponsors of this legislation deserve praise for aiming to improve the state’s higher education sector as a whole while protecting each individual institution.



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