

SENATE Testimony: SB362 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024

Senate Budget and Tax Committee

Submitted by: Sandra L. Kurtinitis, Ph.D. President

Community College of Baltimore County

February 29, 2024

POSITION: Oppose

I write with urgency in support of continued full funding of the John A. CADE Community College Funding Formula. I ask you please not to support the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) that would reduce community college funding to pre-pandemic levels. The CADE formula was written into law in 1996. For 26 years the presidents of the 16 Maryland community colleges lobbied hard to finally achieve full funding in 2022. The CADE Formula was at 17 cents to the dollar when I arrived as CCBC's president in 2005; in 2022 it proudly achieved the full funding of 29 cents to the dollar. **Now the rebased BRFA formula will translate into a \$4.5M cut to CCBC.**

After this exhaustive 26 year struggle, we thought we had won more than a momentary hand shake deal. Given the populations we serve, we thought we had been given a promise of the full funding promised by the law. We are struggling to understand how it could be possible that we would now revert back to a grueling process of annual rebasing. If "a dream deferred is a dream denied," as the saying goes, so is a promise! We ask that you resoundingly reject the BRFA. The long overdue, hard won promise of full funding to Maryland's 16 community colleges finally fulfilled, should not be reversed.

Recently, a national organization Opportunity America has referred to community colleges as "The Indispensable Institution". We form a vital link in powering the state's workforce needs. To borrow from TS Eliot, we are the "practical cats" of higher education. Never having received full funding, we grew accustomed to administering our college budgets with two hands and one leg tied behind our backs, although the role we play provides an almost unmatched return on the state's investment. Last year Maryland's 16 community colleges educated and trained close to 300,000 Marylanders. We awarded 30,000 degrees and credentials and transferred 9,115 community college graduates to the University of Maryland System. Whether we are educating accountants, nurses, welders, cybersecurity experts, construction workers, or dancers and poets, we believe everything we do is workforce development. In addition, because we serve the most vulnerable and challenged populations, we are an integral part not only of the state's workforce system, but of its commitment to its equity agenda. No other sector of higher education can do what we do for Maryland.

It is true that community college enrollments declined over the past few years...as did enrollment at every other two and four year college sector both in Maryland and across the nation. The populations we serve were hardest hit by the long reach of COVID; a pandemic rife with the fear and uncertainty naturally impacted many lives lived at the edge. Now that conditions have normalized, enrollments have begun to grow; statewide community college enrollments increased by 8.3% this past Fall, numbers clearly indicating a predictable, if gradual return to normal.

When we review and implement what we have learned from the pandemic, we will all look a little different when we finally emerge from its grasp. The generous levels of federal stimulus money are indeed gone. But the need is not. In order to be the 21st century community colleges

that Maryland needs for its 21st century students for the state's 21st century jobs, we need a competitive level of funding. We need a fully funded CADE Formula to provide the resources to achieve state of the art currency in everything we do: technology, curriculum, facilities, equipment, institutional systems, and faculty and staff expertise, all of these retooled to meet tomorrow.

I beg the Legislature to consider that this is not the time to disinvest in your community colleges. As the nature of work is changing right before our eyes, we intend to play a role in refining and defining the education and training needed to equip and upskill the workforce of tomorrow. We 16 represent a huge economic engine primed to feed the economic well being of our communities and thus the state. A sufficient level of consistent funding promised as long ago as 1996 by a Legislature that believed in the capacity of its community colleges will prove an even greater return on investment.

Every community college leader in Maryland is committed to ensuring that Maryland is equipped with a technologically literate, yet humane citizenry able to thrive and not just survive in the world as a global village. Our challenge is how to refit ourselves to educate and train for the jobs of today and tomorrow. I repeat the injunction that "No other sector of higher education does what we do!" When 82% of our students come from socially and economically vulnerable communities, our work is hard, but we are committed to living our mission because we love our mission. **Please help us do the important work ahead of us by defeating the BRFA and supporting full CADE funding for FY2025 at 29 cents on every dollar the University System receives.** Staying true to the "Promise," I "promise will pay dividends."