

Testimony before the Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
SB603 University of Maryland, College Park Campus – TerpsEXCEED Program
February 12, 2025

Favorable

Dear Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for considering this important bill. My name is Amy Dwyre D'Agati. I am faculty at the University of Maryland College Park in the College of Education, and I am the Director of TerpsEXCEED. TerpsEXCEED is Maryland's only fully Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program (IPSE) for our state's young adults with intellectual disabilities (ID).

I thank the House Appropriations Committee for taking the time to consider the importance of state support for this initiative and the powerful effect it will have across Maryland.

BACKGROUND: What is IPSE? Inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) – also referred to as Inclusive Higher Education - is college that includes people with intellectual disability. With IPSE, students with intellectual disability can develop the skills to live, learn and earn after high school, just like their peers and their siblings. There are over 325 IPSE programs across the country serving over 6000 students with ID – a small number compared to nearly 9,000 IHEs in the US serving roughly 16 million students. Education is a right for all, and TerpsEXCEED at UMD makes that happen. Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Florida are examples of states that offer support to their IPSE programs.

Why the financial sustainability of TerpsEXCEED is important to Maryland:

Affordability for constituents

TerpsEXCEED is the only fully inclusive post-secondary college option for students with ID in Maryland, and therefore the only affordable option for Maryland families. We partner with MSDE/Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) so that all of our students who are eligible and have open vocational rehabilitation cases have tuition, room and board paid for by DORS. Without options in Maryland, our families would have to choose a program in NJ, PA, DE or VA – which either becomes too expensive for families to afford, or our state agencies spend extra Maryland funds to send a student out of state.

Constituent Desire for Growth and Expansion

We conducted a Statewide Needs Assessment at the end of 2023. Our survey was largely completed by parents (n=284) but also included K-12 educators (n=44) and faculty at institutions of higher education (n=37). Our sample ranges across the counties of Maryland with the most respondents coming from Montgomery County, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Charles County. The results showed that an overwhelming majority of families and educators believed young adults with ID would benefit from inclusive higher education, were dissatisfied that there is only one option in Maryland and requested that there

be more options closer to their own communities. Faculty at IHEs were interested in learning more and open to the idea of starting programming. In our past three application cycles, we received 30+ applicants for fewer than 10 openings.

In addition to statewide expansion, students and families are requesting that TerpsEXCEED be a four-year program, which would involve expanding beyond the current 2-year programming. In order to expand both within TerpsEXCEED and across the state, current funding options are insufficient. Annually we piece together funds from a combination of one-year state grants, donors, small fees charged to families, and internal College of Education funds in order to cover three part-time staff – a staffing level which in itself is insufficient to support up to 20 students with very individualized accommodation needs and manage the training and scheduling of over 150 undergraduate peer mentors. Past federal funding options through the Department of Education are questionable going forward.

Outcomes that benefit our state economy

Adults with ID historically have high rates of unemployment or underemployment. Research has shown that adults with ID who participate in college programs make more money and work more hours per week than those with no college. With TerpsEXCEED and its replicability, more Marylanders with ID become tax-paying citizens, contributing meaningfully to our state economy. In addition, thousands of college graduates in Maryland who become trained and certified as mentors will enter industries within our state economy with the knowledge, experience and initiative to create inclusive work environments, and have enhanced skills in problem-solving, creative team management, and implementing inclusive practices – contributing to an overall stronger state economy.

Ongoing, sustainable and meaningful funding from the state would allow TerpsEXCEED and the University of Maryland, College Park to:

- Grow and build the current programming at College Park to become a national model of inclusive higher education for students with ID
- Develop a Plan to replicate the TerpsEXCEED model in other IHEs across Maryland, providing guides, standards and technical assistance
- Become the statewide Hub for inclusive higher education that works ongoing with IHEs across Maryland to implement a network of high standard inclusive higher education options for Marylanders with ID
- Ultimately serve hundreds of students with ID and impact thousands of trained undergraduate peer mentors annually
- Build a stronger state economy

Thank you for your consideration on HB458 and we request a favorable report.