



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM *of* MARYLAND

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 983

Higher Education – Academic Program Approval - Objections

March 17, 2026

Information

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 983. This bill would repeal the requirement that a proposed new academic program would have to be at the graduate level for the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) or an institution of higher education to file an objection to the proposed program's implementation.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's 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.

MHEC has begun convening the Program Review Process Advisory Council (PRPAC). The PRPAC membership includes the leadership of our state's public and independent segments of higher education, as well as other higher education leaders who have a stake in the effective and legally compliant management of the program review process. MHEC and this Council are engaged in ongoing work to account for the State's workforce needs, while being mindful that Maryland is not best served by highly similar programs addressing similar student populations. Current law narrows duplication objections to graduate and professional programs, though MHEC still evaluates whether State resources are being used appropriately at the undergraduate level.

Managing objection processes takes considerable time and attention at MHEC. A program objection adds months to an approval process. Expanding the chances for duplication will take focus and bandwidth away from MHEC's work to complete implementation of other elements of the 2024 program approval statute. Further work with online program analysis is to be done. MHEC has introduced new program approval processes, especially for graduate and professional programs. These processes require further time and attention to enhance their effectiveness. There is every expectation that with the input of the PRPAC, in time MHEC will be able to improve processes to meet Maryland's needs and to enhance the spirit of collegiality and collaboration among institutions.

The USM appreciates the opportunity to provide this information regarding Senate Bill 983.

