



## HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

March 10, 2020

### **House Bill 1428 – Environment – Higher Education Facilities – Mold Hazards and Mold or Moisture Problems Support with Amendments**

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 1428. This bill requires the Department of the Environment, in consultation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the Department of General Services, and Maryland Occupational Safety and Health, to adopt certain regulations to require periodic inspections and reports related to the presence of mold hazards and mold or moisture problems in higher education facilities in the State.

We fully support the intent of this bill and we are dedicated to the same critical goals of protecting the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff; as well as preserving the physical integrity of our facilities. As we will outline for you today, however, we are confident that our ongoing actions to address the indoor environment of our campus buildings—particularly as they have been strengthened and enhanced by our Board of Regents, and by each campus president in the last few years—are wholly sufficient to achieve the goals prescribed by this bill.

Last November, a USM press release outlined the findings from a group of independent experts (with deep experience in infectious diseases, public health and communication, facilities management, industrial hygiene, and mechanical systems) that were tasked by the USM Board of Regents with reviewing the issue of environmental health in buildings at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). The expert panel relayed a finding that, in addressing these issues, campus officials followed all recognized federal, state and campus protocols in their efforts to inform the campus and maintain a healthy campus environment. Even more important to our discussion today, they made several recommendations that are helping to inform best practices at all USM institutions, including:

- Establish a broader culture of emergency management and training
- Develop better, more coordinated systems for tracking data, both on and off campus
- Improve campus-wide systems for communicating with faculty, staff, students, families and other outside stakeholders on health and wellness issues.

Ultimately, the USM Board of Regents committed to continue to monitor issues related to student health and work with USM presidents to see that resources continue to be available to address them. With us today are representatives from two institutions, the University of Maryland, College Park and University of Maryland Eastern Shore. They can speak to the nature of the ongoing actions to address this issue.

President Wallace Loh testified in a House hearing earlier this session regarding our campus' ongoing efforts to implement the recommendations resulting from the Board study of independent experts. At that time, he said:

- In addition to immediate interventions, we implemented a comprehensive Moisture Control Plan in our residence halls in the summer of 2019, which included over 100 projects in 19 residence halls and 11 university-owned fraternity and sorority chapter houses. The projects included window replacements, dehumidifiers, piping insulation, roof replacements, HVAC upgrades, foundation waterproofing and more.
- We also implemented extensive training for Residential Facilities staff and created an educational campaign for residents. Along with less extreme weather conditions, these efforts have proven very effective. In fall of 2019, reports of mold in our residence halls and chapter houses decreased 90% compared to the previous year.
- Then, this past fall, we also implemented the MoistureWatch program, which included the installation of smart sensors in strategic locations on campus—70 in housing facilities and 120 in academic and other non-residential buildings. These smart sensors provide an early warning for rapid response. They monitor temperature and relative humidity and calculate the dew point. If humidity rises above 70%, the sensors trigger a notification to the Facilities Management Customer Response and Incident Response units. Staff on these teams work around the clock, 365 days per year. Once an alert is received, a technician is dispatched to inspect the area to begin addressing the issue. This system provides us with constant, cross-campus monitoring of buildings with recurring incidents of mold. It enables us to precisely target spaces that need monitoring and centralizes the data, empowering us to respond proactively.
- We have also made significant improvements in the way our University Health Center (UHC) tests for and tracks illnesses. The UHC has increased on-site laboratory testing of patients to get results more quickly. The center also reports results more quickly—on a weekly basis—for cases of flu-like illnesses, gastroenteritis, and other communicable infections. It also updates the Chesapeake Regional Information System every two weeks instead of monthly.
- As another proactive step, we are working to get specially targeted information to students, faculty and staff with compromised immune systems and other underlying health conditions. Under federal law, we can only do this once people self-identify their situation, and we are actively encouraging them to do this so we can increase these alerts. In the past six months, approximately 400 additional students self-reported. We also ask such students to meet with a UHC provider at the beginning of the school year.

Our work in these areas is ongoing and we will continue to make improvements throughout campus to address the recommendations in the report.

Our Chancellor, Jay Perman, testified in January regarding how the best practices at College Park and other institutions are being disseminated for implementation at other campuses.

- He reiterated that the Board-directed study provided many useful recommendations for use by all USM campuses.
- In addition, the handling of mold in campus facilities has been discussed collectively with the Presidents in meetings of the Council of University System Presidents (CUSP) both subsequently and prior to the release of the report.

- Finally, with the assistance of the Office of the Attorney General, the USM has surveyed campuses for current policies and procedures regarding managing and responding to environmental hazards and will be working with each President to ensure that they implement applicable best practices in this area.

Let me restate his remark that the health and safety of all USM students remains a priority and will continue to be an ongoing topic of communication between the Chancellor, Presidents, and USM staff going forward.

For example, in June of last year, our Board approved a list of housing and other projects related to student life as part of the System's Five Year System-Funded Construction Program (SFCP). The Board's high priority on student health and safety was immediately evident in looking down the list of projects to be completed—particularly related to campus residence halls. For example:

- In the FY2020-24 SFCP there are a number of renovation projects in residence halls currently in use at four different campuses: UM College Park, UMBC, Towson and Frostburg.
- These projects, with funding that has been previously approved and new funds contained in the proposed budget, will invest \$255 million in improving the components to enhance the health and safety of students living on campus.
- Work includes major improvements to heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, preventing exterior water infiltration, replacing plumbing and electrical systems, and adding security and alarm systems.

Similarly, requests from the State for funding under the Capital Improvement Program (for academic and administrative buildings) include the same kinds of improvements. Renovation and renewal of facilities is—and will continue to be—the single-highest priority for Board requests into the foreseeable future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Given the ongoing actions and focus by the USM and each of our campuses on these issues, we request this bill be amended into a requirement that the USM report to the Governor and General Assembly on our efforts in addressing these environmental hazards and plans to continue to monitor and address them in the future.

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*Mark Beck*  
*USM Office of Capital Planning*  
*410-576-5741*  
[mbeck@usmd.edu](mailto:mbeck@usmd.edu)