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Testimony

SB 609 Higher Education - St. Mary's College of Maryland – Cost-of-Living Adjustment

SB 609 changes the funding formula for St. Mary's College to provide 100% funding for any Cost-of-Living Increase (COLA) provided to state employees. Currently, their formula calls for only 50% funding. St. Mary's is the only higher education institution that is treated this way. The University System of Maryland and Morgan State University currently receive 100% of the cost of the state employee COLA.

This funding formula was at least an improvement from the previous one which had no allowance for COLA's. In 2017, St. Mary's argued that increases in benefits and compensation were increasing at a higher rate than revenues. However, instead of bringing St. Mary's up to the level of COLA funding as USM and Morgan, legislation only provided the smaller 50% amount.

The problem now is that in Collective Bargaining negotiations with AFSCME Local 3980, St. Mary's administration seeks to limit the COLA increases to 50% of whatever state employees get. In FY 2020, for example, when state employees received a 3% COLA in July of 2019, St. Mary's proposed a 1.5% at the bargaining table. Through negotiations, it was eventually increased to 2% but it was delayed by 3 months – bringing the fiscal year costs back down to 1.5%.

Our members work very hard to support St. Mary's. At this point, they can't help but think that they are being treated as second class citizen since they are the only institution in the state of Maryland put in this predicament. We urge you to support these employees and provide 100% funding for COLA's at St. Mary's College.

We urge you to provide a favorable report.

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