



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 10, 2021

TESTIMONY

Submitted by
Dr. Maureen Murphy, President

HB 0894 – Community College Collective Bargaining

Position: Oppose

The fiscal reality of public higher education, especially community colleges, is dire. Even before the pandemic, community colleges were significantly underfunded, a situation which hasn't improved. While I understand the very human desire for job security, I do not understand why HB 0894 comes at this time when community colleges are at their most fragile.

Since March, our colleges have moved nearly every function to a remote platform, retooled every student and employee system, devised new protocols. We have focused our work keenly on serving our students, many of whom are in crisis.

Community colleges are social justice through education and exist to provide opportunities for social and economic mobility for those who do not have easy access to post-secondary opportunities. While our region's minority population is 40.6%, the College of Southern Maryland's (CSM) minority student population is six points higher at 46.6%. Before the pandemic, 65% of College of Southern Maryland students were part-time, over 80% in the paid workforce, and half reported significant family responsibilities.

Since then, our students have lost jobs, scrambled to keep themselves and their children connected virtually in a region with absent or spotty broadband, experienced high levels of food insecurity, as well as increased mental health challenges.

The College of Southern Maryland has responded by providing emergency funds, distributing technology, tripling efforts to combat student food insecurity, and increasing mental health services exponentially. We've provided this assistance against a backdrop of a global pandemic while also supporting our faculty and staff through a variety of initiatives. We continually create new solutions to mitigate the effects of an evolving health and enrollment crisis that will not end in short order.

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Imposing collective bargaining and its related costs on us at this time when we are struggling feels punitive. The State of Maryland doesn't fund us at its required level. Our counties are justifiably very worried about their revenues. At CSM, we anticipate the cost of collective bargaining, which neither the state nor our counties can afford to support, would fall on the shoulders of our already stressed students and result in an approximately 8% tuition increase at a time in which they are at their most financially fragile. This is the worst possible time for our students to see large spikes in tuition.

Community college enrollment across the country has dropped because of economic pressures beyond our control, and stimulus funds, while appreciated, are a temporary fix and do not begin to cover our losses. Still, we marshal on, simply because our mission has never been more important to the learners we serve.

HB 0894 adds additional fiscal and cultural disruption to our colleges at a time when we are doing our level best to keep them afloat. We serve the most at-risk populations, who desperately need us now to get back to work. Further, we produce the front-line workers, and it's critical that we keep those pipelines open.

Imposing collective bargaining at community colleges at this time dilutes our ability to respond to the pandemic and undermines every system we've put in place to support our students and employees. The effect of HB 0894 would be to add substantial expenses to the least resourced sector of education that serves the least resourced Marylanders at a time when their need is greatest. For this reason, I urge an unfavorable report for HB 0894.