

Donald B. Tobin
Dean and Professor of Law
University of Maryland
Francis King Carey School of Law

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1268
Before the House Appropriations Committee
March 11, 2021**

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and members of the Committee, my name is Donald Tobin, and I am the Dean and a Professor of Law at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. I am pleased to join Delegate Henson, and my colleague Ronald Weich in expressing my strong support for HB 1268, which creates a Legal Education Success Collaborative between the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, the University of Baltimore School of Law, and the Maryland historically black colleges and universities. Funding for this collaboration will allow us to provide financial assistance to diverse students attending law school, thereby increasing diversity in the legal profession and helping ensure that justice and legal assistance in Maryland is provided by a diverse group of highly trained lawyers.

Both law schools in the state have a history of providing excellent legal education for the next generation of lawyers and leaders. It is critical that these lawyer/leaders be diverse and that a legal education is available for a broad group of people in our state. We at Maryland are proud to be the number one school for African American enrollment for any law school ranked in the top 50, and we congratulate the University of Baltimore on being rated one of the top schools for African Americans by National Jurist magazine. We both work hard to recruit, educate, and train a diverse student body. We are an essential partner in creating a diverse workforce. But we need your help.

The history of diversity and inclusion in law schools is not one that we are proud of. Law schools, like other educational institutions, often denied opportunity to people of color. For the University of Maryland, it took a lawsuit by Thurgood Marshall, and a decision by our Court of Appeals, to open our doors to Donald Gaines Murray and people of color 84 years ago.

We honor Donald Gaines Murray, Thurgood Marshall, and those who fought for integration by educating some of the most influential diverse leaders for the state. We are proud of our diverse lawyer/leader alumni like Elijah Cummings, Stephanie Rawlings Blake, Angela Alsobrooks, and Charles Sydnor, who sits in this body and is a sponsor of the bill. We also boast about superb practitioners like Kenneth Thompson, the monitor of the Baltimore Consent Decree, and James Benjamin, the new Baltimore County Solicitor. Additionally, we are proud of alumni who are dedicated judges and leaders in the State, like Andre Davis and Clayton Greene. At a recent gathering of African American lawyers at the law school organized by our own Professor Larry Gibson, I noticed a room full of distinguished judges, state legislators, and leading lawyers. Our state, and our world, are better because of these lawyer/leaders.

Today, we are asking that you help us succeed in our mission to improve diversity in the legal profession, by supporting Maryland's law schools in encouraging and recruiting diverse students to attend law school. This collaborative supports two existing programs at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and the University of Baltimore Law School –

Maryland's Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative, and the University of Baltimore's Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence.

In 2017, with the support of several law school partners, Maryland Carey Law created our Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative. Our program currently has eight law-firm and business partners including, DLA Piper; Gallagher, Evelius & Jones; Gordon Feinblatt; Miles & Stockbridge; Pessin Katz; Deloitte, T. Rowe Price, and our newest partner Semmes, Bowen & Semmes. These law firms and businesses provide financial support for our program, but also help mentor and encourage our students. The goal is to provide both a financial and academic environment that allows diverse students to not only succeed, but also to thrive.

The Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative offers financial and professional support to 10-15 academically talented students annually (for a total of 30-45 students at any one time). Diversity Scholars have demonstrated leadership and an ability to overcome challenges. In addition to financial assistance, the students receive mentoring from our partners, attend networking events, participate in activities in the legal community and at the law school, and have access to other skill-building exercises. They also build a strong community within the program to support each other and contribute to each other's success and sense of belonging. This year we successfully moved the program to a virtual format, and created additional opportunities for community building.

The program is designed to both encourage students to enroll at Maryland Carey Law, and to support their success once they arrive. Too often, prospective students' view of lawyers is derived from what they see on TV or read in novels. We want our students to expand their view of what it is to be a lawyer, and to strive to be the next generation of great lawyer/leaders. Our inaugural class which graduated in 2020, is already evidencing inspiring results. For example, Chukwukpee Nzegwu from Silver Spring has made the most of law school. He was on the trial team that won the Battle of the Experts competition at Drexel. He also traveled to Malaysia to present a paper at an environmental law colloquium over the summer. Chukwukpee helped asylum-seekers in our Immigration Clinic and was very active in our Black Law Students Association. He was heavily recruited after law school and is now an associate at Womble Bond Dickinson. Another diversity scholar, Brandon Wharton, who is graduating this year, was editor in chief of the law review and will be clerking first in the United States District Court in Maryland and then for the Fourth Circuit for a judge from Maryland. After his clerkship, he plans to work for Gallagher, one of our firm partners..

And today, you will hear from one of our most recent scholars, Randall Ainsworth. Randall is a diversity scholar and is our first Elijah E. Cummings scholar. He is from Baltimore, attended UMBC, worked here in Annapolis, and was heavily recruited by law schools. We were pleased to be able to recruit him to Maryland through our diversity scholarship program.

Through mentoring, and exposure to different types of law practice, we hope that the Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Initiative will help our students reach new heights like it has for Chukwukpee and Brandon.

We cannot accomplish this important goal without financial support. We need a pathway whereby diverse students believe that they can succeed academically and financially in law school. The aim is both to increase the pool of diverse students applying to law school, and to encourage the great students to stay and obtain their law degrees here in Maryland.

As a profession, we have been unsuccessful in dramatically increasing our diversity over the last thirty years. We simply must do better, and to do that, we need a coordinated approach. One that helps prepare more students for law school, makes it financially plausible for them to attend, nurtures them to succeed while they are in school, and supports them as they enter the profession. True justice in our society requires that all members of society feel a sense of belonging. That the legal system is not stacked against them, and that justice is not just for a chosen few. A legal profession that looks more like the citizenry it serves is an important component of promoting justice for all. HB 1268 helps us achieve that task. Therefore, I strongly urge the Committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1268.