

**TESTIMONY OF RONALD WEICH
DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW**

IN SUPPORT OF HB 1268

**COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**

March 11, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and members of the Committee. My name is Ronald Weich, and I serve as dean of the University of Baltimore School of Law. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support House Bill 1268 which would establish a Legal Education Success Collaborative in the State of Maryland.

I am proud to join Senator McCray and my colleague Donald Tobin from the University of Maryland School of Law in this initiative to ensure that all Maryland college students have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality legal education, and to strengthen diversity in the legal profession. A large share of the lawyers who practice in Maryland are graduates of one of the state's two law schools. It is vital for public confidence in the administration of justice that our schools educate lawyers drawn from all of Maryland's diverse communities. This bill will help us to meet that challenge.

HB 1268 would support the program at the UB School of Law that has already proven to be successful in producing excellent lawyers who reflect the community they serve.

Our school has long sought to identify, mentor and educate promising students from all backgrounds. The current incarnation of our efforts is a program known as the Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence, a unique collaboration between our law school and Maryland's four historically black colleges and universities. The Program prepares Maryland's HBCU students to gain admission to law school and then continues to help them thrive in law school and beyond.

Each year, eight students from Maryland HBCUs are selected to participate in an intensive law school "boot camp" program. Law School faculty and staff provide extensive LSAT preparation, one-on-one academic support, networking opportunities, career counseling and individualized wrap-around services for non-academic issues related to health, finances and family matters. In addition to these eight scholars, a dozen other HBCU students receive free LSAT preparation services. Successful students can earn scholarships to UB Law including the possibility of a full scholarship.

The Program has had a significant impact on the lives of the more than one hundred HBCU students who have gained admission to law school. Graduates from Bowie State University, Morgan State University, Coppin State University and the University of Maryland

Eastern Shore have attended UB with great success. The program is a national model; in 2017, it received the American Bar Association's prestigious Diversity Leadership Award.

The Program is currently named in honor of pioneering UB Law alumna Fannie Angelos and in recognition of a generous donation of seed money from her brother Peter Angelos beginning in 2013 and lasting for five years. Since the end of that five-year period, the law school itself has been able to provide limited funding and our dedicated faculty and staff have volunteered their boundless time and energy. At this time, we seek state support to enable us to strengthen the program.

Maryland would not be the first state to recognize that government support for a collaboration between a state's law school and its HBCU's is in the public interest. In 2018, the California legislature appropriated \$4.5 million to allow HBCU students to attend the University of California's Hastings College of Law. Just as that state understood educational equity and diversification of the legal profession to be worthy public goals, so should this body support Maryland students in a like manner. This is an opportunity to reinforce the state's commitment to its HBCUs while also strengthening collaboration among the higher education institutions within the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic. I urge the committee's favorable report of HB 1268.