

Testimony by Isiah Leggett

Regent, University System of Maryland & Universities at Shady Grove Board of Advisors Member
Maryland House of Delegates Appropriations Committee Hearing for HB 1446 - SUPPORT
March 15, 2022 – 1 p.m.

My name is Ike Leggett, former Montgomery County Executive and now a member of the University System of Maryland’s Board of Regents. I am also a member of the Universities at Shady Grove’s Board of Advisors. As all of you know, Montgomery County is well known for educational excellence and for having some of the most educated residents not only in the state of Maryland, but of anywhere in the nation. We have a world-class school system and one of the nation’s leading community colleges.

But 20-plus years ago, as we approached the millennium, we were struggling with the fact that we did not have the presence of a four-year university – hampering both our economic and workforce development challenges. Many of us who were in leadership roles at that time wanted to bring just that to Montgomery County – a four-year university campus.

What we arrived at instead, with USG, was a bit of a compromise – the opportunity to bring to a single campus some of the best and most in-demand academic programs from various public universities within USM. And for the undergraduate programs, only the junior and senior level courses, so that USG would work as a partnership with Montgomery College or other community colleges to provide students with the first two years toward a bachelor’s degree.

USG was then, and in many ways still is, a unique and incomparable higher education model. The good news is it has proved to be very successful – most importantly, that it works for students. In total, about 13,000 undergraduate and graduate degrees have been awarded to students who have attended the campus over the past two decades. Each of those graduates emerged with a diploma from one of the nine universities that have offered programs at USG.

Many of the students who have attended USG note that if not for its existence, they may not have been able to pursue their goal of earning a bachelor’s degree at all.

I have often said that although USG has proven to be successful – due to a lack of resources – it is, in many ways, “fighting below its weight class.” With more resources to support and attract the right programs, we can do an even better job of addressing workforce development challenges.

USG has proven to be a sound investment – for the students it serves and for the workforce needs that it addresses. Many of the programs at USG have been brought there specifically because they are designed to prepare students for careers that are aligned with the industries and employers within the region.

This bill will help by providing much-needed funding to ensure that USG can continue to provide the degree and certification programs that students need to succeed in today’s economy, and that meet the demands of the employers that will be hiring them. I urge your support for HB 1446 and thank you, as always, for your strong support of higher education across the state.