

Testimony by Ken Mills

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Maryland House of Delegates Appropriations Committee Hearing,, HB 1446 - SUPPORT

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Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Ken Mills and I am the CEO of REGENX Bio, one of a number of fast-growing life sciences and gene therapy companies that are based in Montgomery County, along the I-270 Technology Corridor.

REGENX Bio's headquarters and research labs are located within the county's visionary Shady Grove Life Sciences Center, which also includes our neighbors with the beautiful campus just down the street, the Universities at Shady Grove. I was pleased recently to be named to the USG Board of Advisors. Today, I address you both in that capacity and as a representative of our region's thriving life sciences industries – all of which depend so heavily on the availability of highly skilled and well-prepared talent to help us advance our mission of improving lives through the curative potential of gene therapy.

One thing that attracted me to USG is the fact that they are working to bring to the campus specific, tailored programs that are developed specifically to meet the workforce needs of our industry and the region. One such example is UMBC's Translational Life Sciences Technology program, which was developed with input from leaders at NIH and area life sciences firms. In many cases, the TLST program provides an opportunity for students who have already attained their associate's degree in biotechnology from Montgomery College to go on to earn their bachelor's degree as a UMBC student at USG.

Other examples of recently launched university programs at USG that are tailored to workforce demands include two new engineering programs from the University of Maryland, College Park's Clark School of Engineering; and Master's programs in Biotechnology, Cybersecurity and Data Science from UMBC and from the University of Maryland, Baltimore, in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics. Most of these programs were launched and brought to the USG campus, thanks to the existence of the state's Workforce Development Initiative funding.

There was an article recently in BioBuzz that focused on the career pathways being developed through these programs at USG. In that piece, Joe Sanchez, Director of North America R&D Science Engagement at AstraZeneca, was reported as noting at a meeting of the Maryland Life Sciences Advisory Board that within the next five years, there will be hundreds of thousands of position openings within the state's life sciences ecosystem. As noted in the article, "the industry needs physicians and trained scientists, communicators, writers, policy-makers, educators, maintenance employees, accountants, and more. All of those roles can be achieved through opportunities at the institutions that make up USG."

Like many of our industry colleagues, REGENX Bio is in a period of rapid growth and on the verge of life-changing medical breakthroughs and life-saving gene therapy discoveries. But key to our ability to fully realize our potential will be the consistent ability to attract and retain the kind of talent we will need – the kind of well-educated and skilled people who are coming out of career-building programs such as those offered at USG, right down the road in our own community.

Thank you and I ask for your support of HB 1446 and the funding it will provide to support programs at USG that will meet the needs of our workforce.