

**House Appropriations Committee**

**Testimony by Dr. Sandra L. Kurtinitis**

**President of the Community College of Baltimore County**

**March 15, 2022**

**HB 1101 – Community Colleges and Nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education – Funding**

**POSITION: Support**

As President of the Community College of Baltimore County, serving as Chair of the Presidents Council of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), I am pleased and proud to offer testimony in support of HB 1101. In a year when community colleges may finally see full Cade funding come to fruition, I applaud and thank Delegate Feldmark and others supporting this bill for recognizing that further investing in the state's long underfunded community colleges by increasing the CADE percentage-funding tie to 30 percent is an investment in the economic well-being of the state.

Since 1995, 16 community college presidents have been striving mightily to reach full funding of the CADE formula at 29¢ for every dollar the university receives. For each of the 17 years of my tenure as President, I have joined my colleagues in this effort, watching the tie with university funding go from 17% in 2005 to the hoped for 29% in 2022. But we are the practical cuts of higher education, accustomed to administering our college budgets with two hands and one leg tied behind our backs. We are almost giddy at the thought that we might not only meet the Cade-funding tie this year, but possibly rise to the 30 percent tie promised as long ago as 2006.

It may seem greedy to ask for more, but we hope you will not only excuse us, you will support us as fulfillment of a long overdue promise to 16 institutions that form a vital link in powering the state's workforce needs. We can do much to support our students with full-funded Cade; think of how much more we can do with an additional 1%.

Recently a group known as Opportunity America completed an economic report describing America's community colleges as "The Indispensable Institution". "Indispensable," indeed, for the role we play provides an almost unmatched return on the state's investment. Last year Maryland's 16 community colleges educated and trained 408,000 Marylanders, and we awarded 193,778 degrees and credentials. We believe everything we do is workforce development, whether we are educating accountants, nurses, welders, cybersecurity experts, construction workers, or dancers and poets (even poets have to eat).

Our "open door" remains permanently ajar and each year we welcome close to a half million Marylanders into our classrooms. Because we serve the most vulnerable and challenged populations, we are as much an integral part of the state's equity agenda as we are to its workforce agenda. No other sector of higher education can do what we do for Maryland.

It is true that some ask why would we need more funding when enrollments have declined. Please do not let this temporary circumstance, brought on by the fear and uncertainty rife within a pandemic, deter you from finally funding your community colleges at a level they deserve. For us, enrollment is cyclical, greatly influenced by the external environment. Please do not penalize us now. Your community colleges serve the most socially and economically challenged populations; life is hard. These are not necessarily people who turn to education during a crisis. Additional funds will not only let us minister to their education issues, but to all the issues our students suffer through: mental health, food, insecurity, transportation, and childcare.

We know that emerging from the pandemic Maryland's community colleges are destined to play a key role in the economic revitalization of our regions and our state. We will need this new infusion of funds to ensure that we can be what you need us to be. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Colleges achieving state of the art currency in everything we do: technology, curriculum, facilities, equipment, institutional systems, and faculty and staff expertise retooled to meet tomorrow.

I ask you to support this legislation to actualize the strong public policy stance which the General Assembly took in 2006 when they set a 30% Cade funding goals. This is not the time to disinvest in your community colleges. The nature of work is changing right before our eyes. We intend to play a role in refining and defining the education and training needed to equip and upskill Maryland's workforce of tomorrow. We 16 represent a huge economic engine for education and training across the state. With a sufficient level of funding, you can expect an even greater return on investment.

We know that education is the "great leveler and the greater lifter". Given who we are and whom we serve, no other sector of higher education can do what we do to meet the state's workforce needs. Everything we do is workforce development, enabling students to move directly into the workforce with a degree or certification. We ask you please to take a leap of faith, to support this legislation, and then step back to appreciate the incredible return on investment.