

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**

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

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

**February 15, 2023**

**SB 359 – Community Colleges Tuition and Residency Waivers-Funding**

**POSITION: Support**

As President of the Community College of Baltimore County and Chair of the Presidents Council of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), I am pleased and proud to offer testimony in support of SB 359 and to thank Senator Guzzone for his sponsorship.

As president of a community college with an open door mission, I write to support this legislation that would finally begin to address a longstanding funding shortfall based on the significant number of students who receive legislatively mandated tuition waivers at our colleges. As you know, Maryland’s community colleges serve the most vulnerable populations in our state, and each of us holds a longstanding commitment to invite everyone into our classrooms through an “open door” that sits permanently ajar. And when you live your mission—and you love your mission—that is what you do. Nonetheless, unfunded tuition mandates add a significant “unfunded” cost to this commitment.

To use my college as an example, annually CCBC serves just under 4,500 students across the several categories of official waivers. While we welcome these students as we do all students, the financial impact is sizable. Ultimately our goal is indeed to support all students and thus apply the waivers that make it possible for many to attend our community colleges who otherwise might not be able to do so. Nonetheless, after many years of quietly absorbing this cost, we are pleased to see that SB 359 may finally provide some financial redress.

Supporting these populations of students is critical to Maryland, yet waiving their cost of attendance is not easily sustainable if we are to continue to provide the special support services many of these students need and deserve. Waiving tuition does not waive away the cost of educating a student with special needs and to do so at the highest level. These costs are passed onto other students through tuition increases or by underfunding programs and student services.

Currently, Maryland has—by legislation—a series of mandated tuition waiver policies forcing the colleges to simply absorb these uncompensated educational expenses. At CCBC, these mandates amount to \$3M. In a world in which we are looking at every policy or practice through the lens of the needs of the students sitting in our classrooms today, the existing model strains our goal of providing the highest quality support for these students. SB 359 will enable us to better support these students with additional services such as interpreters, tutors, and counseling to supplement their academic goals.

We applaud and support Senator Guzzone for advancing this proposal and for lending both sensitivity and understanding to the delicate balance that exists when serving thousands of students created by unfunded waivers.

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