



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 334

DATE: February 6, 2024

SPONSOR: Delegate Solomon, *et al.*

ASSIGNED TO: Appropriations

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POSITION: Support (Development Ombudsman, Office of the County Executive)

Higher Education – MPowering Joint Steering Council – Funding

On behalf of the Office of the County Executive of Montgomery County, I want to express strong support for House Bill 334, which would mandate funding for the MPower program within the University System of Maryland for the purpose of supporting the Institute for Health Computing (IHC) located at North Bethesda in Montgomery County.

The MPower program was envisioned by the Legislature as a way to leverage the core strengths of the University of Maryland at College Park and the University of Maryland, Baltimore to create a research entity that could compete with the premier research institutions in the country. The creation of MPower moved Maryland into the top 20 academic research institutions in the country by combining the research of the two respective institutions. The IHC is a next step forward in leveraging the respective strengths of the universities in computational and health research at a single joint location close to both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the largest cluster of private sector life science assets in Maryland.

Montgomery County is at the core of the nation's third largest private sector life science cluster, centered in Shady Grove. The County is also home to the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, which is a tremendous economic asset for the County and the State of Maryland. However, of the ten largest life science clusters in the U.S., until recently, Montgomery County had been the only one without a major life science academic research presence, which had put the County at a competitive disadvantage in attracting prospective life science companies to the County and the State.

Two years ago, Montgomery County committed \$40M in County funds spread over five years to provide start-up support for the IHC to be created in North Bethesda. The benefits to the County were to address the competitiveness issue for the County with out-of-state life science clusters and to support the local private sector innovators. As noted above, among the benefits to the Universities was the close proximity to both the large number of private life science companies in the County and to the large number of researchers at NIH, the U.S.

Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The Universities committed \$30M of their funds over that same five-year period.

Although the County is currently among the areas well-positioned to be a leader in the next generation of life science investment and discovery, the competition is fierce. Montgomery County and the State of Maryland are competing for life science industry leadership not just with Boston, Silicon Valley, and Texas, but, in recent years, also with the counties in Northern Virginia. The State of Virginia committed \$100M to higher education in Alexandria to win the Amazon HQ2 competition and, since that time, has been trying to move beyond those Amazon tech jobs with a state commitment to spend \$1B over ten years on higher education in the Northern Virginia area to compete for life science and tech company jobs, in direct competition with Montgomery County and the State of Maryland.

Artificial Intelligence is expected to move health care discoveries forward at a very accelerated pace going forward. The IHC is poised to be among the leaders in that effort but needs the State support provided in this bill. The economic benefits of this investment will accrue not just to Montgomery County but also to the home campuses of the Universities in College Park and Baltimore.

In addition, the very diverse, de-identified data that the University of Maryland Medical System has developed will allow the IHC to be an important addition to efforts to address the State's and the nation's terrible problems with health disparities. Maryland should be the leader in that work and the funding for the IHC in this bill will make a difference.

For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable vote on House Bill 334.