

**Senate Bill 81
Board of Trustees, College of Southern Maryland
Unfavorable Report
January 24, 2024**

As the Board of Trustees for the College of Southern Maryland, we request an Unfavorable Report for SB 81 – Higher Education – College of Southern Maryland – Budget.

In 2000 the College of Southern Maryland became one regionalized community college. The law enacted in 2000 provided for one regional college serving three counties with equal representation on the governing Board of Trustees. That same legislation created three separate and independent operating budgets for each campus. At the time, that local budget process worked well. But times have changed, especially in today’s post-pandemic world.

In 2020, following two years of extensive deliberations by the College with our three county Boards of Commissioners and our Delegation to develop a local budget process, the State Legislature authorized the College of Southern Maryland to operate under a unified budget, effective for Fiscal Year 2022. The counties agreed that the College’s operating budget model needed to focus on serving the students of each county, rather than just the physical facilities of each campus. Together, we agreed that a more equitable distribution of local funding based on a student’s county of residence as well as where they are taking classes. The process also honors our students’ success, academic excellence, and financial and operational efficiency as core expectations and that the college must be able to respond nimbly to students’ needs.

The College truly reflects the regional concept. The College is the workforce pipeline for all of Southern Maryland and employers welcome qualified graduates from all three counties. Like the college has a footprint in each of our three counties as well as a much larger virtual presence, our workforce partners similarly hold a regional perspective. In fact, the college held a community convening in September and we received overwhelming feedback from our region’s partners in the nonprofit, military, healthcare, and economic development fields that CSM must approach our programming from a regional perspective and that the college be the hub of workforce development in Southern Maryland.

We also know that our students are mobile, and because of our strategic locations throughout Southern Maryland, students who work in one county and live in another can choose the location that best serves them including online. The college has 11 online programs of study and more than 26,000 enrollments just in online courses. This tremendous growth of our online classes has been possible due to the ability to assign resources and costs to a virtual campus that is tied to all three counties.

As of Fiscal Year 23, almost 45 percent of CSM students attend two or more campus locations across the three counties and another 32 percent take online classes. There is tremendous growth in online education. And as notably demonstrated during the pandemic, there are no county boundaries in the virtual classroom. The ability to allocate resources based on student's needs and where they are ultimately benefits all students.

As we prepare our Fiscal Year 2025 budget, the College of Southern Maryland is only now in our second year of operating under a unified budget model. We fully recognize the trust placed in the College by our three Boards of County Commissioners and our Southern Maryland Delegation members when they unanimously endorsed our local budget process. We also understand the imperative for accountability and transparency and the need for continued collaboration with our counties. We must now advance this trust, understanding we need to provide fuller reporting that demonstrates greater accountability and transparency to assure the counties that our distributions of their county's funding are equitably allocated.

Combined, our three counties fund about 30 percent of our overall annual operating budget, and we are grateful for their support to help make the College of Southern Maryland more accessible to the demands of our students and more efficient in the way we manage and operate our virtual and physical campuses serving our three counties. It is important to note that our concern with SB81 lies in the potential for these proposed changes to disrupt the collaborative spirit and operational efficiencies and student equity that have been achieved through the current one college budget process.

As trustees, the nine of us represent our counties equally, and we are committed to support each location equitably according to their unique needs and student population. We respectfully request this committee provide an unfavorable report to SB81 and allow us to maintain our current budget process as we continue to work with our county partners in providing them greater accountability and transparency. Thank you.

Board of Trustees, College of Southern Maryland

Shawn B. Coates, Chair
Sonja M. Cox, Vice Chair
Kenneth (Kee) Abell
Celeste Alexander-Frye
Cathy Allen
Pamela Cousins
Jose Gonzalez
Christy Lombardi
Cordelia Postell