



Maryland Higher Education Commission

Appropriations

House Bill 762

Maryland Higher Education Commission - Higher Education Goals - Revisions

February 11, 2025

1:00 PM

Favorable

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 762. I am Dr. Sanjay Rai, Secretary for the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). Chair Barnes, thank you for sponsoring this legislation. You have been a champion of higher education in Maryland for several years.

This bill is a departmental bill for the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), which would revise Maryland's 2013 completion goal.

To strengthen the United States' economic competitiveness on a global scale, President Obama established a national postsecondary attainment goal aimed at ensuring the country remained a leader in the proportion of college graduates worldwide. We quickly followed suit as one of the first states to set a statewide attainment goal. As you are aware, the Maryland General Assembly, through the College and Career Readiness and Completion Act of 2013, set a goal that: by 2025, at least 55% of Marylanders would hold at least an associates degree.

MHEC subsequently established institutional targets, and our institutions have generally exceeded these goals, reaching 727,000 degree holders based on the most recent 2024 data. This is an outcome that should be applauded. Our colleges and universities have and continue to contribute hundreds of thousands of skilled residents to help boost Maryland's economy.

As a result, Maryland has come close to achieving a 55% attainment rate. However, Maryland is projected to fall short of fully meeting the "55 by 2025" goal—not due to a lack of institutional success, but because overall degree attainment is influenced by factors such as statewide in-migration, out-migration, employment requirements, and workforce retention.

Even if we reach 55%, we will not fully address Maryland's workforce demands, particularly in nursing, healthcare, cybersecurity, and other high-need fields. We must also confront persistent inequities in postsecondary attainment. Only 43% of Black Marylanders and

30% of Hispanic Marylanders have a postsecondary credential and, like all of you, we are committed to ensuring that we leave no Marylander behind.

To close these gaps and better align with economic and workforce needs, we have studied the strategies of other states—many of which have revised their higher education goals to incorporate workforce alignment and economic competitiveness. We propose broadening Maryland's goal to include certificates we know are critical to our economy, alongside associate and bachelor's degrees. The shift to be inclusive of various credentials recognizes that there are a variety of high quality pathways through our Maryland colleges and universities that not only enhance the well being of our colleagues and neighbors, but also our communities and our state.

Our revised goals will also define "credentials of value"—postsecondary credentials that both meet industry demands *and* provide students with economic mobility, ensuring access to family-sustaining jobs. This aligns with approaches taken by states like California, Colorado, and North Carolina, and a much larger national movement that recognizes the variety of higher education opportunities. which have implemented targeted credential initiatives to meet labor market needs.

For the past 10 months, we have worked closely with Maryland's colleges and universities, providing data on their progress toward the 2025 goal and identifying areas for improvement, including several private career schools. Moving forward, MHEC will continue to consult Maryland's institutions of higher education and draw insights from other states which have revised their attainment strategies before bringing final goals to the Commission for their approval.

A major milestone in this process was the inaugural Student Success Summit, where we engaged institutions in discussions about the future of higher education in Maryland. Following this, we requested reflection reports from campuses, which are due in mid-February. The responses so far have been highly encouraging— indicating that institutions are eager to move forward.

Maryland was a leader in 2013 when it became one of the first states to set a statewide postsecondary attainment goal. At MHEC, we are committed to developing a plan that reflects Maryland's needs for the next decade. By bringing together partners in and around higher education, we have the opportunity, the resources, and the collective will to not just to set ambitious goals, but to be the first to achieve them.

In closing, I fully support House Bill 762 and ask the Committee for a favorable report. Investing in these priorities will ensure that Maryland remains a national leader in higher education, workforce development, and research-driven economic expansion.