

Legislative Testimony in Opposition to HoCo 1-25

Presented by Daria J. Willis, Ph.D

On Behalf of Howard Community College

Before the House Appropriations Committee

Date: March 26, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Daria J. Willis, and I am proud to serve as the fifth president of your Howard Community College. I am here to express my strong opposition to **HoCo 1-25** and its accompanying legislation, **Senate Bill 813**, which stands to set a precedent statewide for college governance structure and open meeting compliance.

This bill raises significant concerns that could undermine the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees and the college's operations at a time when political uncertainty around higher education and student support has never been more prevalent.

We support more diverse community access in decision-making, fundraising, and advocacy for our students. Our current trustees did not seek this expansion and do not think it is essential for building student success. These trustees, with more than 60 years of combined experience in higher education as educators and executives, are working daily to reduce the impact of federal policymaking that may reduce student funding, eliminate diverse representation in teaching and learning, and even remove students from the academic environment based on their citizenship status.

These trustees do not want to confront significant challenges from federal policymaking while distracted by the potential new standards outlined in HoCo 1-25. Our accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, has already submitted its analysis of the possible problems this bill would create if enacted and singularly applied to HCC and no other institution in the state.

Legislating executive training, conducting board meetings, and providing public meeting access should be a last resort for any public agency, particularly when HCC and our county delegation, with the support of the entire General Assembly, have a proven track record of successful collaboration. Please look at this bill in the context of all we have achieved in tandem over the last three years.

We have worked together to fund and will soon break ground on Howard County's first workforce development and skilled trades center. We reopened a campus childcare center that closed during the pandemic and built a new mathematics and athletics facility that has emerged

as a jewel of tourism for the county. We opened the state's first Boys and Girls Club to be headquartered on a college campus, and we have built a regional and national profile in workforce apprenticeships in critical fields like cybersecurity, healthcare, and childcare.

We are actively working with our lawmakers, employees, and community stakeholders to meet goals of transparency without the need for new legislative standards. I ask the committee to consider if this proposal represents the 23,000 students we all are charged with protecting, inspiring, and pushing to live their dreams and if, through its passage, it positively improves the work of HCC and 15 other community colleges statewide.

On behalf of those students, I humbly ask our delegation and this committee to work with the college and its stakeholders to develop more balanced and practical solutions that support HCC's mission and success.

We are indebted to you for your partnership and remain optimistic about all the good things that lie ahead through our current and future collaborative spirit. Thank you for your time and consideration.