

Dear House Appropriations Committee,

I thank you all for the opportunity to explain in writing why I am in favor of SB 813.

When I was hired in 1997 as a new full-time faculty member at Howard Community College, I had no idea what a powerful and positive role HCC would play in my life and how much I would come to love this college and this community. My children were pre-schoolers in HCC's Children's Learning Center years ago and now take courses on campus as dual enrollment students. So I speak to you tonight as an HCC employee, as a faculty union member, and as an HCC parent.

I have worked under five HCC college presidents (including two interim) and their respective Boards of Trustees, and over my 28 years of employment I have witnessed tremendous growth and many positive changes. Until 2022, there was strong evidence that HCC faculty and staff perceived our Trustees as good stewards of the college, upholding high standards for higher education, as responsive and engaged with community needs, and as the servant leaders at the top of the college's organizational chart, holding the college's senior leadership accountable for organizational excellence. However, now there is an unprecedented lack of confidence among employees that the trustees are being given accurate information and feel empowered to question it. One specific indicator is that an important source of information about HCC employees has been removed. The (QuEST) survey (which stands for Quality Evaluation of Service Trends) used to be conducted yearly at HCC, providing all employees with a voluntary and anonymous opportunity to give their own candid assessment of college services, campus climate, job satisfaction, and college leadership. The results were used to recognize units that provided high quality service, to set goals, to allocate resources, and to focus on improvement activities. The college seemed to value the consistent trend data that accrued to provide a data-informed view of the organization's excellence and employee experience over the years. HCC students are given the opportunity to provide feedback about their courses and professors every semester, and the college explicitly emphasizes to the students that these surveys are voluntary and anonymous to encourage candid, valid feedback. But HCC employees have not had an opportunity to provide candid feedback through the QuEST survey or any other anonymous instrument since 2022. None of us imagined that this opportunity to contribute our voices would be removed and that we would require legislative help to restore it.

Since recent faculty testimony on this bill before the House, HCC employees were emailed a new survey that looks like a version of the old QuEST; however, unlike the former survey, it no longer contains any opportunity to evaluate senior leadership nor the Board of Trustees, nor does the message about the survey promise confidentiality or indicate how the data will be used or reported. To employees, it looked like a hasty attempt to remedy the exposed omission rather than a meaningful outreach towards rebuilding trust, welcoming diverse opinions and voices, and re-establishing open lines of communication across all areas of the organization.

I support the bill so that we might truly begin to heal and restore the culture of trust, transparency, and accountability that made HCC such a Great College to Work for so many

years even as we move forward together to meet the new and pressing challenges of higher education today.

Thank you for your service to our communities and for your care in ensuring the integrity and accountability of our leaders.

Sincerely,
Tara Hart, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair of Humanities