

March 24, 2025

Dear Honorable House Delegates, my name is Beth Dushman. I am an associate Professor of physical science at Howard Community College and I have been teaching here since 2019. Thank you for providing this opportunity for me to express my support in favor of SB 813 with amendments.

When I first started teaching at HCC, I was impressed by the collegiality and collaboration between faculty and administration, and by the shared sense of purpose to provide excellent education for Howard County students. However, over the past three years, I have been disappointed to see that partnership disintegrate and for faculty voices to be dismissed on many major initiatives, including several campus-wide reorganizations, the introduction of 7-week classes, and on HCC committees.

While the intentions of these initiatives might be for the benefit of the students, the implementation has been, quite frankly, a disaster. For example, we normally have a college-wide schedule for final exams, meant to provide adequate time for exams and reasonable timing and breaks for students. Last semester, that schedule was abruptly thrown out. In the resulting chaos, faculty scrambled to rewrite exams for shorter periods or split them into two classes, and students struggled with back to back exams without a break. Furthermore, the change in scheduling increased the amount of time each class met, beyond what is prescribed by our accrediting agency. When this issue was brought to the administration, they expressed surprise and indicated that they were unaware that finals week had been removed. This is just one example of how the lack of transparency and communication in decision-making has a direct impact on students.

Similarly, there have been huge reductions in tutoring, advising, and counseling services, making it harder for students to access these services. As faculty, we WANT our students to succeed, and having these support systems in place, with clear instructions about how to access them, is crucial to our mission.

By contrast, the information presented at Board of Trustees meetings paints a much rosier picture, implying that the college is providing a wealth of tutoring, advising, and support systems for students. Increased transparency both to and from the Board of Trustees will provide a clearer sense of what is actually happening on the ground, and will allow us to better focus our time, energy, and resources on creating a better learning environment for students.

Furthermore, there is a lack of transparency in how financial decisions are made and endorsed by the Board of Trustees. At many Board of Trustees meetings, it seems that expenditures are presented and rubber-stamped, with very little or no discussion at all about the potential benefits and costs to the college. As faculty, we are constantly being warned that the college is running out of funds, yet we are hiring many new administrators at ever-increasing salaries, paying for several external consultants, and funding frequent travel for the college's executive team. At the February Board of Trustees meeting, Board members congratulated the new external Human Resources consultants on their "big reveal:" that they intended to pay employees on time that week. That this was a cause for celebration is a clear indication of how much we need stronger oversight and more transparency into how decisions are made.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration, and we look forward to your support.

