



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM *of* MARYLAND

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Senate Bill 899

Education – High School Class Rankings and Guaranteed Admissions to Public Senior Institutions of Higher Education

February 19, 2025

Information

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in the form of a letter of information on Senate Bill 899.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

This bill requires Maryland high schools to rank their students and then for public senior institutions of higher education to accept students based on that ranking and certain related formulas. This bill closely resembles legislation just now being implemented in Wisconsin and has similarities to guaranteed admissions policies in other states. Some states exclude the flagship from guaranteed admissions or have other limits tied to various criteria. The implementation of the bill is contingent upon the existence of high school rank, which is currently not available from a high number of high schools across the state.

The USM supports what seem to be goals of this bill: to ensure that students know that if they do well in school, they have a place in our public higher education system and to ensure that public higher education institutions reach students whose communities have been under-represented in higher education. This committee will have seen the USM Joint Chairmen's Report submitted this fall that shows for every Maryland high school, public or private, how many applications there were to each USM school, how many students were admitted, and how many enrolled. Total application numbers, acceptance rates, and yield rates for each university with first-time students are also posted on the USM's website. From these data sources, we see that for fall 2024 entry to college, there were over 67,000 Maryland high school applicants to a USM school (excluding UMGC). Most were accepted. The flagship, appropriately, was the most selective but still admitted 35% of applicants, and with comparable acceptance rates across the state. Public data also show the next lowest acceptance rate, 52%, was at Coppin State University. One thing these data suggest is that students are applying where they are a good fit and where they are

likely to be accepted. Our institutions work hard to convey to prospective students what their expectations are for students, both for admission and for success after matriculation.

The USM universities strive to reflect the full diversity of the State. In addition to three well-regarded Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the USM is home to three more Minority-Serving Institutions. For many Maryland students of color, these institutions are the college of choice. But four more USM universities, as well as the Universities at Shady Grove, have highly diverse undergraduate populations, and all campuses are engaged in proactive outreach to attract students who belong to communities under-represented in higher education. The question is whether Senate Bill 899 would have unintended consequences for the diversity of, as well as in, our institutions, especially in the unique context of Maryland and its wide range of public institutions. There is a chance that students guaranteed admission to College Park based on high school rank might choose the flagship, regardless of other factors and overlooking other institutions that provide them with better scholarship opportunities or other benefits. Would a guarantee to the flagship impact the enrollment or the enrollment profile at HBCUs? Or at regional comprehensives, which as the DLS budget analysis for USM noted, are under more enrollment stress in recent years?

It is important for universities to be prepared to serve well the students they admit, and understanding the curriculum and experiences students have had helps determine if the students have the potential to be successful. While it is a common practice for states to adopt common minimum high school course requirements for first-time, first-year students seeking admission at a senior public institution, admission standards are still typically established by individual institutions dependent upon their mission and targeted student population. These requirements are tied to the supports institutions can provide. Each USM institution invests in academic support services targeted to help their unique student populations succeed. Holistic admission processes help institutions determine if they have the appropriate environment for the applicant to succeed. Differences among high school curricula mean that the top 5% or 10% at one high school does not necessarily closely resemble the same rank at another high school. USM universities have commented on the potential cost of implementing additional support services for students guaranteed a spot regardless of their complete academic profile.

There are other financial costs of this bill as well. All institutions would need to adjust their admissions processes, and some have noted the need to hire additional staff to manage additional applications. Those institutions that anticipate greater enrollment, especially the flagship, need to consider additional capacity in terms of residence hall space, faculty, peer mentoring, and other educational costs. The fiscal note from College Park is over \$14 million annually. Institutions that could see less enrollment might have negative financial impacts.

Guaranteed admissions policies have varied across states, as have results. According to the non-partisan Education Commission of the States, and adding in the new Wisconsin law, there are currently [13 states](#) that guarantee admission to their public universities for certain eligible students. Most of these states are not our competitor states. California has an admissions policy that prioritizes admission to eligible students, but admission is subject to availability, and students are subject to university enrollment limits. Results from these state programs vary, both in terms of overall enrollment impact and demographic composition. The Wisconsin flagship,

which is larger than College Park, is just now implementing the Wisconsin law, on which this bill is based. The school is struggling with the capacity increase it will have to make.

It may be worth noting that guaranteed admission for Maryland community college transfer students is expanding across USM. This route both facilitates overall college affordability and ensures that students who are guaranteed admission are ready to succeed at the four-year.

Senate Bill 899 aims to assist students in understanding that college is possible. We want to ensure that students hear that message, however it is delivered. This bill could be impactful, although its impacts may not all be clearly predictable. It will also have financial impacts, some of which are likely to be substantial.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share this information with you regarding Senate Bill 899.

