

Esteemed Senators,

My name is Brendan Diamond, and I have been working at Howard Community College since 2016. Before that, I was at a community college in Tallahassee, Florida. First, I want to take a moment to thank you for your public service. As a fellow public servant, I understand the long hours and sacrifices that come with the job, and I truly appreciate your dedication. I see that same level of commitment in my faculty colleagues, who devote their lives to education. The requirements put forth in SB 813 are crucial to ensuring a quality education for our community. The bill will codify the most basic level of transparency and accountability, what had been a norm, but has been shattered under current leadership. Any prior board would have no concern abiding to these common sense provisions.

When I first joined HCC in 2016, it was apparent this was an excellent organization. When I interviewed, I was asked about what opportunities I saw in the near term, and I expressed interest in mentoring a student physics club and sharing student research more broadly. That small suggestion was supported at every level of the organization, and I had the pleasure of bringing students supported by HCC to multiple regional, state, and national conferences. I found an incredible community of educators—faculty who genuinely loved their work and went above and beyond to support students. During my time at HCC, faculty launched a peer-reviewed journal, entirely volunteer-run, supported by grants, and funded by organizations like the National Science Foundation, the WR Grace Foundation, and the Kahlert Foundation. Many of these funds went directly toward scholarships, which I helped award as the coordinator of the undergraduate research program. These scholarships provided invaluable opportunities to students who might not have otherwise had access to them.

However, in recent years under the current leadership, structural changes at the college have made it increasingly difficult to sustain these initiatives. Funding that once supported scholarships and faculty-led projects has either disappeared or become impossible to track. When I asked where those scholarship funds had gone, no one seemed to have a clear answer, yet we see administrators regularly attending leadership conferences with little to show from their travel.

At the same time, faculty working conditions have deteriorated. Uncertainty about employment from semester to semester has become the norm. Early retirements and resignations have increased, leaving gaps in mentorship and instruction. The impact of these changes isn't just felt by faculty—it directly affects students.

I have seen the profound difference that strong institutional support makes. I have worked with students like Kathleen Hamilton, who went on to become a leader in STEM at Johns Hopkins, and Goldwater Scholar Samuel Barnett, whose time at HCC shaped his path. These students, and many others, thrived because of the opportunities they had at HCC. But I worry that mismanagement and a lack of oversight are eroding those same opportunities for future students.

That is why I urge you to ensure that the Board of Trustees is properly engaged in oversight. We must bring transparency and accountability back to college spending, ensuring that resources are directed where they are needed most—toward students and faculty, not layers of unnecessary administration.

Thank you.

Brendan Diamond

Professor of Physics/Astronomy