

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



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 University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) is proud to be the flagship of the University of Maryland System with a mission to provide excellent teaching, research, and service. UMD educates students and advances knowledge in areas of importance to the State, the nation, and the world. The University's mission commits it to being a preeminent national center for research and for undergraduate education, and the institution of choice for Maryland's undergraduates of exceptional ability and promise. In order to fulfill this mission, UMD has developed an expert application review process which allows the identification and admission of the best possible students to benefit from and contribute to these goals. This process is one which has been carefully developed and fine-tuned over decades and is not taken lightly.

We want to thank the bill sponsor for introducing a bill this year that recognized some of the difficulties presented in last year's legislation. UMD appreciates many of the changes to the bill, but still has several concerns we would like to address as indicated below.

- Guaranteeing admission to the top 5% of Maryland high school graduates has the potential to fill more than 60% of the entering UMD class, while not recognizing the unique mission of the flagship campus. It would, in effect, eliminate our ability to select and shape a class of students that is academically competitive, intellectually, racially, and socially diverse, routinely engaged in leadership experiences, and active outside the classroom.
- It is often the case that several students share a rank within each school. If, for example, a class with 400 graduates has 5 students sharing each rank in the top 5%, this would mean that 100 students would be guaranteed admission instead of the 20 students presumed to be in the top 5%. Extrapolated out over the many high schools in the state of Maryland, it is possible that the entire class of admitted students would comprise students who were guaranteed admission. Individual High Schools would need to be responsible for breaking all ties.
- Given the rise of dual enrollment (which continues to gain popularity throughout the state of Maryland) the calculation of class rank will be exceptionally challenging. While these students are enrolled in college level courses, these courses are not calculated in class rank. As a result, the students who are enrolled in these courses are unlikely to have a class rank which reflects the level of their achievement.

Again, we appreciate the bill sponsor's work to make this a better bill. We remain concerned that a guaranteed admission process is likely to offer an admission guarantee to students who are already advantaged. Class rank is typically determined by weighted grade point averages (GPA) earned by

students who are able to earn extra “weight” through their enrollment in advanced courses like Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes, and honors courses. This means that a competitive GPA is earned by students who not only do well in their classes, but are also enrolled in as many of these advanced courses as possible.

Data has routinely demonstrated that lower income students are less likely to access AP and IB classes than their wealthier counterparts. According to US News and World report: “...these kinds of rankings can have a negative effect on students' social and emotional health. They have led to increased stress and students putting unhealthy pressure on themselves...Peer competition sometimes leads to grade inflation attempts, as students may choose to enroll in less challenging courses to earn an A.” Teachers currently report there is already pressure from parents to change grades, this will only be exacerbated when the grades influence class rank and GPA ultimately influences college admission.

Thank you for your consideration of this complex issue and we look forward to a continued conversation.