

March 21, 2025

Members of the Senate Finance Committee
Chair Pamela Beidle
Vice Chair Antonio Hayes

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to provide this testimony on behalf of Frostburg State University in support of HB0779. Although I am now retired after 43 years of service to FSU, I had the opportunity to participate in the Bobcat Innovation Lab last November. It is the type of program that would be supported by this legislation.

Eighty students were randomly divided into 13 teams. The student participants were joined by subject matter experts, along with other mentors that represented several different academic departments during this two and half day program. I was greatly impressed by the level of student engagement and student learning I witnessed.

The student teams were focused on designing solutions to address real-world problems that are particularly relevant to rural areas. During the program, they defined the problem, conducted research to deepen their understanding of the issue, and then designed a solution that they presented to a panel of judges. They enhanced their skills in collaborating with others, and their ability to communicate how their projects would contribute to the economic development of Western Maryland.

The program was thoughtfully designed to include team-building activities, and opportunities for each of the groups to receive valuable feedback from experts throughout the weekend. The students accepted the challenge to demonstrate a growth mindset, an entrepreneurial spirit, and professionalism throughout the weekend. Several of the students I talked with shared how transformational the program had been for them.

Passage of this legislation would promote the economic development of the State, and deepen our students' confidence that their ideas can become viable solutions to a variety of challenges that are confronting our region. This legislation will also strengthen the partnerships the University has with local businesses and community leaders. I am convinced it will be a wise investment.

Sincerely,

Thomas L. Bowling
Vice President for Student Affairs, Emeritus
Frostburg State University

