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Dear Chair Pamela Beidle, Vice Chair Antonio Hayes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony **in support of HB 799** on behalf of Frostburg State University and the Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad. I appreciate your time and attention to this important legislation and your ongoing commitment to strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship throughout Maryland.

As part of the University System of Maryland, Frostburg State University plays a critical role in advancing economic development across Western Maryland. The Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad is one of our most impactful efforts, actively broadening Maryland's innovation pipeline by opening doors to individuals who have followed different paths in life — students who may have never been exposed to entrepreneurial thinking, pitch development, or the resources needed to turn ideas into real ventures.

In just 18 months, the Launch Pad has already delivered **real-world impact**:

- Several participants have **secured jobs** in the industry because of their experience and projects created in the program.

- One individual actively talks with multiple companies to commercialize their innovations.

- Several student groups have gone on to **attend entrepreneurial and innovation workshops** and have been featured on podcasts—opportunities they likely would not have pursued otherwise.

- The survey data demonstrates that **all participants have improved** their ability to develop, refine, and pitch ideas confidently and clearly.

- One *student team* regularly visits their subject matter expert's restaurant (Community Cafe) and **continues to collaborate** with that local business, which is an authentic example of community-rooted innovation.

These outcomes show the power of intentional, inclusive innovation programming — especially for students who may not come from traditional business or startup backgrounds. The Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad helps students imagine new futures for themselves and equips them with the tools to succeed, thereby strengthening Maryland's economic engine from the ground up.

To sustain and scale this success, **we use minimal** but strategic funding (~$55,000) for the following:

- Compensating the program committee and subject matter experts, whose mentorship is central to the program's success;

- Supporting students with meals, small incentives/prizes, and resources throughout the intense weekend-long experience; and

- Providing follow-up funding to help promising ideas grow beyond the event;

- Maintaining tiered prize support to reinforce achievement and momentum: $2,500 for first place, $1,500 for second, and $1,000 for third. While modest, these awards provide critical validation and seed support.

Looking ahead, we plan to continue supporting students by connecting top teams to regional conferences, such as the TEDCO Expo and other innovation-focused events. These opportunities expand students' professional networks and help sustain the energy and momentum built during the Launch Pad.

We also recognize that much of this program's success is due to the **goodwill and generosity of university staff and subject matter experts** who have donated their time and expertise beyond the event. Their continued involvement will depend on securing the support and recognition they deserve.

The Launch Pad has already demonstrated new economic development and entrepreneurship pathways that were not previously accessible to many of our students. With the support of HB799, we can continue to foster innovation that is not only inclusive but also transformational — for individuals, communities, and Maryland's economy.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael B. Flinn

Director, Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad

Professor, Chair, and Graduate Coordinator

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