

# **HB 799 Written Testimony SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Uploaded by: Al Delia

Position: FAV

FROSTBURG STATE UNIVERSITY  
TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
HOUSE BILL 799 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - MARYLAND INNOVATION INITIATIVE  
INSTITUTION PARTNERSHIP EXTENSION PROGRAM  
SENATOR PAMELA BEIDLE, CHAIR  
SENATOR ANTONIO HAYES, VICE CHAIR  
MARCH 25, 2025  
SUPPORT

Dear Senators Beidle, Hayes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of Frostburg State University (FSU) in support of HB0799. On behalf of Frostburg State University, I would like to thank Delegates Vogel and Buckel for sponsoring this important legislation.

FSU has an unwavering commitment to fostering economic growth and innovation in rural Western Maryland as part of the University System of Maryland (USM). As the only comprehensive four-year university in the Appalachian part of Maryland, FSU plays a critical role in driving economic development through strategic investments in entrepreneurship, technology transfer and commercialization, and workforce development.

A key component of these efforts has been the utilization of Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) funds, which have enabled the university to implement and expand high-impact programs that directly benefit students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. These MII funds have been instrumental in positioning FSU as a hub for innovation and economic growth, particularly in rural and underserved areas. By fostering an environment where students can develop marketable skills, launch startups, and address regional challenges, FSU is creating a pipeline of talent that directly supports economic development in Western Maryland and beyond.

Among the most successful initiatives supported by MII funding are the Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad competitions, FSU's Intellectual Property Disclosure, Validation, Technology Transfer, and Commercialization Program, and the development of a future Regional Cyber Security Operations Center (R-SOC). These initiatives are not just educational programs; they are key drivers of regional economic transformation, equipping students with entrepreneurial and technological competencies while simultaneously addressing critical workforce shortages and industry demands.

Frostburg State University, in collaboration with TEDCO's Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) and the University System of Maryland Launch Fund, successfully hosted two Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad competitions on campus. This unique program, designed to merge the hackathon model with a business pitch competition, provided students with a high-pressure, collaborative environment to develop commercially viable solutions to real-world challenges.

The first event, held in September 2023, saw 70 students from seven different majors apply to participate. The competition focused on critical issues such as distributed energy resources, virtual power plants, climate change, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors. The second event, in November 2024, expanded to include over 80 attendees from more than 20 unique majors, addressing the theme of "Revive & Thrive: Reimagining Rural Resilience."

The mentorship component of the competition played a crucial role in its success. By the second year, the mentorship network had expanded to include over 15 subject matter experts from diverse industries, including small businesses, entrepreneurship, healthcare (including mental health), outdoor recreation, and technology sectors. These experts provided hands-on guidance, offering valuable insights and real-world expertise throughout the competition.

Beyond financial rewards and mentorship, the competition delivered significant intangible benefits. Students improved their pitch and presentation skills, learned to engage in deep discussions with industry experts, and refined their ability to articulate complex ideas while receiving constructive feedback. The competition also fostered an entrepreneurial mindset, exposing students to market research, business modeling, and prototype development. The interdisciplinary nature of the event mirrored real-world professional environments, enhancing students' career prospects and expanding their professional networks.

The Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad has established itself as a premier innovation competition, helping students develop essential skills and transform ideas into practical business solutions. Winning teams continue to refine and scale their projects with the support of industry mentors and FSU resources. Many projects have the potential to be implemented beyond the competition, benefiting local businesses and communities, particularly in addressing rural challenges in Western Maryland. These initiatives contribute to regional economic growth and sustainability and could potentially be scaled for larger markets.

Cybersecurity is an ongoing and growing concern for organizations of all sizes. In rural areas of our state, the concern is no different, though the resources and ability to provide protection to vulnerable organizations are significantly less than in more metropolitan parts of the state. FSU worked closely with Deloitte to conduct a study of the needs and opportunities to establish a Regional Cyber Security Operations Center (R-SOC) in Western Maryland to provide affordable 24/7/365 IT systems security for institutions of higher education, school systems, civic and non-profit organizations, and small businesses that otherwise operate with minimal or no protection against cyber threats.

The result of this work was a comprehensive and detailed implementation plan to establish an R-SOC in Western Maryland, which could serve as a demonstration for other parts of the state or for a statewide Cyber Security Center. A key component of the R-SOC plan was the training of a cybersecurity workforce and the deployment of FSU students and graduates as the backbone of the R-SOC operation. While state budget challenges have delayed initial implementation, continued MII funding will ensure that this initiative becomes a reality, providing critical cybersecurity protection while also fostering workforce development in the region.

With MII funding for Fiscal Year 2025, FSU is developing a thriving entrepreneurial hub that supports the commercialization of new technologies and strengthens the regional economy through the Intellectual Property Disclosure, Validation, Technology Transfer, and Commercialization Program. At the heart of this initiative is the creation of a functional and inspiring space designed to cultivate an entrepreneurial ecosystem, where faculty, staff, students, and community members can collaborate and launch technology-based ventures.

This year, funding will support participation at several key technology conferences, enabling faculty, staff, students and researchers to build industry connections and gain valuable insights into the commercialization process. Additionally, in partnership with TEDCO/MII, we will be hosting seminars and workshops tailored to encourage research-driven innovation. An Innovation Talk Series will bring subject matter experts to campus to discuss emerging trends and strategies for commercialization, while collaborative innovation meetups at the center will provide a platform for students and entrepreneurs to form teams, develop skills, and create startups. Finally, we will be hosting an end-of-year event to recognize the achievements of participants and celebrate their contributions to patentable technologies, technology commercialization, and entrepreneurial success.

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Thank you to the chair, vice-chair, and other esteemed members of the committee for your time and support. FSU respectfully urges continued legislative support for MII funding. FSU strongly believes that the continued Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) funding in Fiscal Years 26, 27, and 28 will be instrumental in sustaining and expanding these efforts. By continuing to support these critical initiatives, Maryland can ensure that its rural communities are not left behind but instead become engines of innovation and economic prosperity.

# **Testimony for Bill.pdf**

Uploaded by: Caleb Heller

Position: FAV

## **Testimony in Support of HB 799**

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

I am writing in strong support of HB 799, which seeks to secure continued funding for the Bobcat Innovation Launchpad. As a participant in this program, I have had the privilege of gaining invaluable experiences that have significantly impacted my personal and professional growth.

The Bobcat Innovation Launchpad provided me with an incredible opportunity to engage with professionals and subject matter experts in the fields of technology and entrepreneurship. Through this program, I was exposed to real-world applications of the skills I have been developing in the classroom, which gave me a deeper understanding of the innovation and business development processes. It was more than just an educational experience—it was a chance to develop meaningful connections with industry leaders and peers, which has been instrumental in expanding my network and broadening my career possibilities.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program was the hands-on learning environment. I was able to collaborate with a diverse group of individuals, all working toward common goals in innovation and entrepreneurship. This experience not only enhanced my teamwork and leadership skills, but it also gave me a clearer vision of what it takes to succeed in today's fast-paced, ever-evolving job market. The Launchpad's focus on cultivating entrepreneurial thinking and practical skills is something that is rare at small, regional universities like Frostburg State, and it has been invaluable to my personal growth.

I urge you to continue supporting the Bobcat Innovation Launchpad, as it provides access to opportunities that can change lives and empower students like myself to thrive in our careers. Thank you for considering this testimony in support of HB 799.

Sincerely,  
Caleb Heller  
Frostburg State University

# **HB 799 Written Testimony SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Uploaded by: Jennifer Walsh

Position: FAV

FROSTBURG STATE UNIVERSITY  
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A key component of these efforts has been the utilization of Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) funds, which have enabled the university to implement and expand high-impact programs that directly benefit students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. These MII funds have been instrumental in positioning FSU as a hub for innovation and economic growth, particularly in rural and underserved areas. By fostering an environment where students can develop marketable skills, launch startups, and address regional challenges, FSU is creating a pipeline of talent that directly supports economic development in Western Maryland and beyond.

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# **Testimony to HB 799\_ Maryland Innovation Initiativ**

Uploaded by: Joe Vogel

Position: FAV



**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**HB 799: Maryland Innovation Initiative University Partnership Program**

Senate Finance Committee

Tuesday, March 25th, 2025 | 1:00 PM

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Innovation is the driving force behind our state's economic growth. While innovation funding has long been concentrated in our state's urban areas and larger universities – it's important to acknowledge the next big technology invention or startup idea can come from community colleges and universities that have not historically seen their share of investment in technology innovation.

HB 799 makes permanent the Maryland Innovation Initiative Institution Partnership Extension Program, which expands opportunities at Bowie State University (BSU) and Frostburg State University (FSU) for entrepreneurial development, and industry engagement. This program has resulted in the creation of over 400 sustained jobs, a 13 to 1 return on state dollars through public, private, and federal funding. The amended version of the bill expands eligibility to additional public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education and makes funding discretionary.

Each institution of higher education must provide a cash match equivalent to 10% to the amount awarded by the Maryland Technology Development Corporation to qualify for participation in the extension program. Additionally, to qualify for a grant under the program, a project proposal must:

- Support the creation of a new technology-based business in Maryland
- Advance technology toward commercialization of a product or service
- Foster entrepreneurial development at BSU, FSU, or other institutions
- Create an opportunity for meaningful economic impact in the region around BSU or FSU; or
- Foster collaboration between BSU or FSU and an industry partner, including (1) product development with commercialization potential and (2) matching funds provided by the industry partner.

Studies have shown that university-led innovation programs contribute significantly to regional economic growth. This bill guarantees that institutions outside the major research corridors can compete for commercialization funding and build stronger ties with industry partners – building a pipeline for long-term economic development. Expanding funding for commercialization initiatives at Bowie State, Frostburg State, and other institutions of higher education will help bridge the innovation gap, ensuring that every region and community can play a role in Maryland's innovation economy.

**I urge the committee to give a favorable report on HB 799.**

# **(final) HB799 - FINANCE -Economic Development - Ma**

Uploaded by: Mindy Lehman

Position: FAV



## **TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

### **HOUSE BILL 799 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - MARYLAND INNOVATION INITIATIVE UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP EXTENSION PROGRAM - ESTABLISHMENT**

**MARCH 25, 2025  
SUPPORT**

The Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO) is dedicated to economic growth through the fostering of an inclusive entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. TEDCO discovers, invests in, and helps build great Maryland-based technology companies. **TEDCO supports HB799, as passed by the House.**

As passed by the House, HB 799 - Economic Development - Maryland Innovation Initiative University Partnership Extension Program – Establishments - establishes the Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) University Partnership Extension Program within the Maryland Innovation Initiative, making permanent the Maryland Innovation Initiative University Partnership Pilot Program, which was created under Chapter 697 of 2021 and expired in 2024 and expands the list of eligible institutions for participation in the program to all public and non-profit institutions of higher education in Maryland.

Chapter 697 of 2021 established the Maryland Innovation University Partnership Pilot Program as a two-year pilot program expanding MII's model to entrepreneurial activities at two of the State's four-year public comprehensive universities, Bowie State University (BSU) and Frostburg State University (FSU). The Program was designed to bolster the pilot universities as anchor economic development institutions for their respective regions and communities and to include the two pilot comprehensive universities in the ecosystem of knowledge and resources available at the State's other major research institution partners party to the MII program, strengthening the respective regional economic development strategies of FSU and BSU and fostering a statewide university entrepreneurship and commercialization ecosystem.

Over the duration of two fiscal years beginning July 1, 2022, the MII worked collaboratively with the two pilot universities to design and implement programs to encourage and support student and faculty entrepreneurship, industry collaboration, and technology commercialization, leveraging state resources to raise awareness, deploy educational materials, and directly fund proposals to strengthen each university's capacity to commercialize innovations. Through these programs, MII, BSU, and FSU have seen significant advancements towards the development of a resilient and lasting infrastructure that fosters and supports innovation and entrepreneurship at the two pilot institutions. Additional information on specific programs launched at each partner University through the University Pilot Program is made available on the MII University Partnership Pilot Program Report submitted on July 1, 2024.

Given the promising opportunities to further strengthen technology-based economic development for the State of Maryland, TEDCO supports the continuation of the partnership established through the program, and several efforts funded through the Program will continue beyond the scope of the pilot. These efforts are supported jointly by the MII Technology Validation Program and technology transfer infrastructure at each university. HB 799 would enable and formalize this continued partnership as well as provide an opportunity for additional institutions of higher education to participate in the program.



As passed by the House, HB 799 also eliminates the mandatory funding of \$500,000 in fiscal years 2027 and 2028 and instead permits discretionary funding of \$250,000 in those fiscal years. Further, the legislation directs TEDCO to produce a report outlining similar programs in neighboring states, and the potential economic benefits and costs of expanding the initiative to all public and private nonprofit institutions of higher education operating in the state. TEDCO anticipates the production of this report can be fulfilled within existing resources.

TEDCO thanks the State of Maryland for its past support of the University Pilot program and appreciates the opportunity to provide a position statement in support of HB799.

# **Gades HB0799 Written Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Naomi Gades

Position: FAV



Dr. Naomi C. Gades  
Department of English and Foreign Languages



March 21, 2025

Dear Chair Pamela Beidel, Vice Chair Antonio Hayes, and Esteemed Members of the State Finance Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to support HB0799. As part of the University System of Maryland, Frostburg State University furthers the mission of “improv[ing] the quality of life for the people of Maryland” in our academic offerings, as well as “programs and services that are responsive to the needs of the citizens of the state and the nation.” Our role in that endeavor comes in our FSU mission to provide “experiential opportunities” and “regional and statewide economic and workforce development.” The Bobcat Innovation Launchpad exemplifies service to our state and region by equipping students with entrepreneurial drive and connections.

When I pitch this hackathon/Shark Tank experience to students, I emphasize free meals. That gets them in the door. But they stay, giving up an entire weekend—Friday evening, Saturday, Sunday—often with extra late nights, because they are engaged in meaningful creative and business experiences with “SMEs,” or subject matter experts: people who have successfully made differences in their corporate, local, or regional communities. As part of the planning committee, I worked this year to bring in the Executive Director of the Allegany Arts Council, President and CEO of the Garrett County Action Committee, and Executive Director of Savage Mountain Punk Arts. Students working on their teams certainly learned how the arts can power economic development, how to leverage community assets, and what it takes to rise to a position of leadership to drive change. I teach a lot in my classes about research and communities, but experiences like this help students sharpen those skills, use them in a business environment, and see first-hand what professional excellence looks like.

I was fortunate enough to be a roamer: I checked in on different groups, made sure SMEs were doing well, etc. I encountered a conversation in which a SME discussed being on the lookout for a promising student to whom to offer an internship. I watched one of our SMEs adopt three different groups as she stayed after hours to keep working with our students. I think, however, the most affecting moment was watching a group pitch a solution for rural food insecurity, leading with one student’s personal experiences growing up in poverty locally. If we want to develop a workforce, if we want to inspire students to better their communities through innovative action, and if we want them to do all of that in a space they find exciting and meaningful, so much so that they allow it to crowd out everything else that might call for their attention over an entire weekend, I can’t imagine what would be better than this.

Respectfully,

Naomi C. Gades  
Assistant Professor of English  
Bobcat Innovation Launchpad Planning Committee Member

# **RommelChristGoualaSupportforHouseBill799.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rommel Gouala

Position: FAV

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**Rommel Christ Gouala**

Frostburg State University  
101 Braddock Road  
Frostburg, MD 21532-2303

March 21, 2025

**Chair Pamela Beidle****Vice Chair Antonio Hayes**

Esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee,,**

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 799, which seeks continued funding for the Maryland Innovation Initiative University Institution Partnership Extension Program. As a participant in the 2024 Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad at Frostburg State University, I had the privilege of collaborating with peers from diverse disciplines to develop innovative solutions to real-world challenges. My team's efforts were recognized with a third-place finish, which significantly enhanced my problem-solving skills, communication abilities, and capacity to work effectively under pressure.

The program provided invaluable mentorship through industry professionals and subject matter experts, who guided us through developing commercially viable solutions and delivering impactful presentations. This hands-on experience not only built my confidence but also helped me establish connections that will benefit my future career. The opportunity to develop practical skills while fostering an entrepreneurial mindset is rare in regional universities like Frostburg State, making this program truly unique and impactful.

House Bill 799 is vital to sustaining and expanding this program, which plays a key role in promoting economic growth and technological innovation in rural Western Maryland. The funding will empower future students to gain hands-on experience with real-world problem-solving, innovation, and industry collaboration. By investing in this program, the state can continue fostering entrepreneurial development and commercialization of new technologies, creating lasting economic benefits for the region.

I strongly urge you to support HB 799 to ensure the continued success of the Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad and similar initiatives.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**Rommel Christ Gouala**

**Student, Frostburg State University**

**Bachelor of Computer Science Candidate**

# **HB 799 Written Testimony SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Uploaded by: Stacy Wassell

Position: FAV

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# **Support for HB0799 - T Bowling.pdf**

Uploaded by: Thomas Bowling

Position: FAV



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



# **HB 0799 - Dr. Micheal B Flinn Letter of Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Michael Flinn

Position: FWA

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael B. Flinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent.

Dr. Michael B. Flinn

Director, Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad

Professor, Chair, and Graduate Coordinator

Department of Computer Science & Information Technologies

Frostburg State University

<https://www.frostburg.edu/dept/cs/>