

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 597

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Distinguished members of the Committee. It is my pleasure to add my voice to that of my USM colleagues in strong support of Senate Bill 597, which leverages Maryland's unique academic and federal assets to secure a leading position in the AI driven global economy.

As a USM institution that has the Carnegie R1, Community Engaged, and Minority Serving designations, UMBC recognizes the potential of this bill to accelerate innovation, foster economic growth, and secure Maryland's leadership in AI.

The global economy is undergoing a transformation driven by AI. This bill arrives at a critical juncture for the State, creating a "single nexus" to advance AI innovation and workforce readiness. UMBC, along with our sister USM institutions, is ready to lead some of the key initiatives identified in the bill and ensure that a diverse pipeline of talent is AI ready for high-paying roles in the future economy.

UMBC has long served as a critical node in Maryland's cybersecurity and AI ecosystem. Our support for SB 597 is rooted in its existing successful partnerships with state agencies and our role as a major developer of the state's technical workforce. Through the Cybersecurity Institute, the Maryland Institute for Innovative Computing, and programs like MTIP, UMBC already provides the state with proofs-of-concept for the work SB 597 seeks to scale. These include a Cyber range that is used by Community colleges and schools across the state, a Cyber clinic, and work to red-team some AI applications that the state is incubating. This bill will enable a more durable and scalable approach.

One of the most visionary components of this bill is the creation of pilot TechExtension Hubs. These will connect citizens and stakeholders in underserved areas of the state with AI resources UMBC. Small businesses, local governments, and school systems for example can get technical assistance, training for local applications like smart farming or smart manufacturing, and access to AI infrastructure.

Senate President Ferguson recently highlighted that Maryland is uniquely positioned in AI but requires bold investment to maintain its lead. USM can serve as the connective tissue for the state's efforts to turn Maryland's AI potential into long-term economic growth, but it must be accompanied by the fiscal commitment necessary to match the efforts of regional competitors like NY, NJ, and MA. I very respectfully urge the committee to support this bill and provide the resources to realize its vision.