



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
House Bill 214
Higher Education – Academic Forgiveness Policy
February 24, 2026
Unfavorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on House Bill 214. The bill requires University System of Maryland (USM) institutions to develop and implement an academic forgiveness policy to disregard an applicant's unsatisfactory or failing grades earned at any prior institution more than seven years before an individual applies for admission.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

USM institutions support the spirit of this bill, and our institutions already have processes that account for previous academic work – including academic failure – in their admissions and readmissions processes. Applicants are reviewed holistically, and a prior failure does not preclude admission. Procedures vary from institution to institution, depending on institutional mission and potentially upon the program and the circumstances and details of the prior record. One failure of a particularly challenging course or failures during a particular period of time sandwiched by periods of success could be viewed differently from a steady series of failures, including at an introductory level. Or a young student may have failures followed much later by great success at a different institution. The bill would require all failures to be ignored equally.

Our institutions take into serious account previous academic work, but also life circumstances and demonstrated improvements. For example, the University of Maryland Global Campus and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore both have mechanisms under which they can invoke forgiveness after a five-year period of separation for many students. Other USM institutions also have academic clemency or forgiveness policies and procedures. These academic forgiveness policies may vary by level (undergraduate, graduate, professional) or by program. Certain licensing programs may add constraints to what is possible for a student.

We are concerned not only about access to higher education, but also about students' success in our programs – and the costs they incur to complete programs. Automatic disregard for previous failures may not be in the student's best interest. Access must be matched with effective support. A process that simply erases past missteps without engagement falls short. Policies for enrolled students who encounter challenges endeavor to provide students with the assistance they need to persist so they do not leave because of failure.

It is vital that as many students as possible participate in a quality higher education experience (access), but USM institutions want students to be successful in a cost-efficient manner. To achieve these goals, students must be reviewed, accepted, and supported in a manner sensitive to the students' individual contexts and to their program. A process that merely disregards a student's past challenges – even after many years – does not serve students, our institutions, or the State well.

