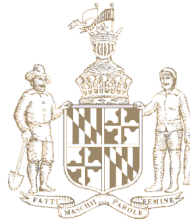


KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Howard and Montgomery Counties

Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 597 - Higher Education - Maryland Artificial Intelligence Partnership

March 27, 2026

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 597, which creates the Maryland Artificial Intelligence Partnership within the University System of Maryland to provide a centralized nexus for stakeholders working to advance artificial intelligence initiatives across the State, and establishes key positions and initiatives towards this goal.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to transform every sector of the economy, create new industries, and significantly expand economic output—making AI skill development and workforce readiness essential for Maryland’s future competitiveness and our ability to attract new businesses and investment. Today, our technology sector contributes nearly \$38 billion to Maryland’s economy, and AI-related job postings in the state have grown more than 40 percent in just the past few years.¹²

While Maryland universities are already national leaders in AI research and education – we need a way to focus and leverage this asset for competitive advantage. Maryland currently lacks a centralized hub to coordinate, align, and accelerate AI initiatives. Without that coordination, our universities, students, employees, and agencies risk being unprepared to fully leverage the rapidly evolving opportunities of AI and to position Maryland as a leading destination for AI-driven companies and innovation.

The University of Maryland, College Park is ranked among the top ten universities in the nation for artificial intelligence and recently launched the Artificial Intelligence Interdisciplinary Institute at Maryland. UMBC is ranked among the nation’s most innovative universities and is launching a new master’s program in artificial intelligence, with nearly two-thirds of its doctoral research already focused on AI, cybersecurity, and quantum computing. The University of Maryland, Baltimore is applying AI across medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and law—from

¹ <https://2025mdmanual.msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/economy/html/economy.html?utm>

² <https://mdbaynews.com/2026/01/07/ai-jobs-maryland-tech-tax-impact/?utm>

developing the nation's first AI-powered surgical performance center to pioneering AI-driven drug development programs. SB 597 helps ensure these innovations do not remain confined to campuses but instead power economic growth and public sector innovation across Maryland.

Several other states have already taken the initiative to build centralized AI hubs and encourage collaboration with higher education. Mississippi,³ New Jersey,⁴ New York,⁵ and Massachusetts⁶ have established AI nexuses, while many other states, including Delaware, Connecticut,⁷ Utah,⁸ and California⁹ have integrated robust AI programs and partnerships with their universities. Fully realizing AI's potential requires training a workforce that knows how to use it effectively, and that work begins with education, research, and coordinated efforts.

SB 597 addresses this need at multiple levels, beginning with establishing the Maryland Artificial Intelligence Partnership within the University System of Maryland (USM). The Partnership will consult with State agencies, higher education institutions, the Maryland Small Business Development Center, and local workforce development boards. In collaboration with these entities, the Partnership will connect and accelerate AI initiatives; identify and pursue funding opportunities to support Maryland's AI goals; and leverage resources to support an AI-ready workforce and government.

In addition to creating the Maryland Artificial Intelligence Partnership, as amended SB597 includes several other provisions to support Maryland's future in AI:

1. Tasks the Partnership with establishing Maryland Technology Extension Hubs to act as points of contact connecting small businesses and community members with AI resources and facilitating access to AI infrastructure;
2. Establishes the Artificial Intelligence Public Service Fellowship in the USM to match students at State institutions with State agencies to address AI projects;
3. Positions the Center for Equitable Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Systems at Morgan State University as a statewide resource for research on the secure and ethical use of AI;
4. Lays the groundwork for an Artificial Intelligence Incubation Lab within USM, subject to a memorandum of understanding between USM and DBM, to help state agencies accelerate the responsible use of AI across Maryland; and
5. Requires the Partnership to establish a Strategic Plan including:

³ <https://www.its.ms.gov/services/innovating/AI-Innovation-Hub>

⁴

<https://www.njeda.gov/governor-murphy-princeton-university-microsoft-coreweave-cut-ribbon-on-major-artificial-intelligence-hub/>

⁵ <https://www.empireai.edu/>

⁶ <https://aihub.masstech.org/>

⁷ <https://www.conncoll.edu/library-information-technology/ai-at-conn/>

⁸ <https://rai.utah.edu/>

⁹ <https://insightintoacademia.com/csu-partners-with-tech-leaders-for-ai-expansion/>

- a. Key metrics for the goals of increasing AI literacy, workforce & business development, research, and innovation;
- b. Business plans for the implementations of the Hub and Lab; and
- c. An analysis of scholarship and fellowship needs and opportunities to expand access to AI in the workforce.

With the establishment of a centralized hub and additional targeted programs, Maryland can become a leader in the technologies of the future. Our State is already home to world-class universities, cutting-edge research, and a thriving technology sector. What we need now is a coordinated framework that brings these strengths together—aligning training, research, industry collaboration, and public-sector innovation so that we can fully leverage and effectively promote Maryland as a hub for AI talent and investment. SB 597 is an important first step in building that framework and ensuring that our State and workforce remain competitive, proactive, and AI-ready.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 597.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties