



## **SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

### **Senate Bill 89**

**University System of Maryland - Regional Higher Education Center - Charles County**

**February 9, 2022**

### **Unfavorable**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on Senate Bill 89. Senate Bill 89 requires the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland (USM) to establish a regional higher education center in Charles County.

The USM agrees with the goal of Senate Bill 89 to make education beyond the associate degree accessible for citizens in the Southern Maryland region, including residents of Charles County. However, we have concerns with the way Senate Bill 89 seeks to achieve this goal.

In order to help inform the committee's deliberations on Senate Bill 89, we offer the following background information.

#### **The Waldorf Center**

The Waldorf Center was organized by UMGC under the auspices of MHEC, not the USM. UMGC had a part-time advisor on site and offered only limited courses. The other institutions that offered courses at that site were Towson University and Notre Dame of Maryland University—both in education—and the College of Southern Maryland, which offered a handful of general education, business or developmental courses. None of the institutions offered a full program there, only courses that might lead to a program either online or at a home campus.

In April 2020, UMGC conveyed to MHEC their intention to leave the Waldorf Center and move their courses to the LaPlata campus (in Charles County) of the College of Southern Maryland. In a letter from the Provost's office to Secretary Fielder, Interim Senior Vice President Peter Smith notes:

*UMGC and the three partner institutions intend to relocate all instructional and student service operations associated with the existing Waldorf Center for Higher Education to the CSM - LaPlata campus location during Summer 2020. The classroom capacity, superior facility, and proximity of the CSM - LaPlata campus to the current Waldorf location ensures that the new site will not only have the ability to continue serving the Southern Maryland community as outlined in the Waldorf RHEC mission and commensurate with its RHEC designation, but to provide a better experience for students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the Center. As a result of the relocation, we anticipate enhanced capacity to meet the educational needs of the*

*Southern Maryland community as a Regional Higher Education Center, and we are collectively committed to improving the student experience and growing enrollments.*

Furthermore, this made sense because UMGC is CSM students' largest transfer institution. These institutions did not remove their presence from the county; they moved the location to better meet the student experience.

### **From the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center (SMHEC) to the University System of Maryland at Southern Maryland (USMSM)**

The Regional Higher Education Center located in California, Maryland, was established in the 1990s, primarily as a site to offer employees at Patuxent River Naval Air Station master's and doctoral programs; graduate degrees in social work and education were added a few years later, and in the early 2000s, what was known as SMHEC—also under the aegis of MHEC—started offering bachelor's programs in other areas, but only minimally. When the Center was merged with USM in 2019, the expanded mission included a broad directive to grow bachelor's completion programs to meet *regional* needs and to support the University of Maryland's research agenda on autonomous systems. The SMART building, which will support that research, opened in October, and we were fortunate to have President Pro Tem Melony Griffith and Speaker Adrienne Jones be part of the grand opening program—and several other Senators and Delegates attended as well.

The expanded dual mission of the center doesn't serve only St. Mary's County. The goal, as laid out by Chancellor Perman, is to serve the entire region. He has said on numerous occasions that if we don't educate Black and Brown students at the same rate as white students, we're failing in our mission. The fact that the region is becoming more diverse, the fact that Charles County is leading this demographic shift, is a moral imperative to open up pipelines in programs unique to the center—programs that can offer degrees in high-demand, high-wage, family-sustaining careers. This kind of opportunity is not easily replicated.

While it is true that historically the center has not had as large a regional footprint or outreach obligation as it should, it does now. Over the last seven years, Charles County residents have accounted for about 60 graduates from the Center each year—roughly a quarter of the enrollments. Covid has stalled enrollment, but with new technologies in SMART, with an expanded portfolio of programs and a hybrid or hyflex model of instruction, we can reach students in the region in ways we couldn't before. Importantly, the Board of Advisors has representatives from the College of Southern Maryland, as well the business, education, and economic development sectors in Charles County.

In addition, the close relationship between CSM and USMSM affords us the opportunity to create a unique educational ecosystem where we educate citizens to take jobs in the area and not need to commute north. We are working closely with them, and with the regional school districts to enhance transfer and learning opportunities.

Specifically related to work in Charles County, USMSM is partnering with NSWC-IH to grow a mechanical engineering internship program like the one at PAX; we are working with the CCPS STEM coordinator to create some robotics build programs through NOAA; and we are planning multiple recruitment events so Charles County students are aware of the seamless pathway opportunities from CCPS to CSM to USMSM affiliated programs in business, finance, education, computer science, engineering, and social work, to name a few. Last, we are working with UMD, Bowie State, UMES, CSM, PGCC and AACC to submit a DoD grant that will increase support for students transitioning from the community college into four-year degree programs at USMSM that will support the DoD. Charles County, and the vibrancy and diversity it brings to the region, will be central to that work.

Since the legislature created the then-Southern Maryland Higher Education Council in 2011, local and regional leaders in education, business, and the military community brought to life the USMSM. This 10-year endeavor examined the needs for higher education in the tri-county Southern Maryland region, identified unmet areas of need, and, in line with its findings, developed recommendations and strategies, both short- and long-term, to improve access to higher education in Southern Maryland's tri-county region. Bottom line: The USMSM is the best approach to expanded postsecondary opportunities in Charles County and the entire Southern Maryland region.

Over a two-year period, the Council conducted site visits to higher education facilities statewide and in the tri-county region, particularly Charles County; participated in briefings by state and regional education and business leaders; conducted regional surveys of students and their families, businesses, and industries to help assess educational needs and interests; and gathered and analyzed data from national, state, and regional databases. Based on the information gathered from these activities and gathered data, and in accordance with the requirements of its re-authorizing legislation in 2013, the Council produced the following key findings.

- The Southern Maryland region contains a range of high-quality educational institutions, and programs. However, opportunities for Southern Maryland residents wishing to stay in the region and complete a higher education degree, particularly a bachelor's degree, had remained limited.
- Non-traditional students, including working adults, seeking a bachelor's degree represented the greatest area of unmet demand in the region, with the disciplines of business/management, engineering, education, computer science, and health care in particular demand.

The USMSM is a prime example of an important regional need backed by the full faith of the General Assembly and led by experienced leaders in government, business and education. Each group approached this task understanding that cost, convenience, and location are the three primary factors that influence whether local residents choose to stay in Southern Maryland and complete a degree. Increasing diversity, equity and inclusion will define what

is at the heart of this work. All of these opportunities are now available at USMSM, and the Tri-County community made it possible.

The USM asks for an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 89, but welcomes the opportunity to continue working with the legislature to expand college access in Charles County and the entire Southern Maryland region.



### **About the University System of Maryland**

The University System of Maryland (USM)—one system made up of 12 institutions, three regional centers, and a central office—awards 8 out of every 10 bachelor’s degrees in the State of Maryland. The USM is governed by a Board of Regents, comprised of 21 members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds. The chancellor, Dr. Jay Perman, oversees and manages the operations of USM. However, each constituent institution is run by its own president who has authority over that university. 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 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, comprehensive institutions, research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

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