

House Appropriations Committee

Testimony by Dr. Sandra L. Kurtinitis

President of the Community College of Baltimore County

February 28, 2023

HB 923 – Higher Education – Appointment of Secretary and Student Financial Assistance Alterations

POSITION: Support

As President of the Community College of Baltimore County and current Chair of the Presidents Council of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), I am pleased and proud to offer testimony in support of HB 932. This legislation, if approved, will bring about significant changes to the Maryland College Promise Scholarship Program, enabling thousands more Marylanders to benefit from this generous initiative.

As testament to the vastly unrealized potential of the Maryland Promise Scholarship, I write to share an astonishing fact. CCBC served over 48,000 students last year and yet, because of the process challenges and application restrictions, our college awarded a paltry 259 Promise scholarships. Year after year, the March 1 application deadline, the processing delays through the well-meaning, but ponderously slow MHEC process, the well intentioned, yet restrictive application guidelines have conspired to convert a marvelous opportunity designed to provide full tuition/fee Promise Scholarship into a “broken” promise for far too many Maryland community college students! The result: millions of dollars go unawarded each year.

Nonetheless, several relatively simple fixes described below can turn Maryland Promise Scholarships into the generous and forward-thinking access tools that the original proponents desired.

- Remove administration of Promise funds from the Maryland Higher Education Council and place the responsibility for distribution of the funds in the hands of the individual community colleges. The federal government trusts our well-trained financial aid professionals to manage millions of dollars in Pell Grants; they can do the same with Promise scholarships.
- Remove the March 1 deadline for filing a FAFSA. Most community college students are working adults who often make a decision to return to college long after an early spring deadline in place largely for high school seniors.
- Award Promise Scholarships to both full and part time students with no priority given to one or the other. Thousands of CCBC students are ineligible because 89% of them attend part time while pursuing either degree and workforce credentials. As most of the credentialing programs are not Pell eligible (i.e. their length of term is fewer than 600 hours), find an alternative to completing a FAFSA to verify income.

Maryland’s community colleges are coming out of the pandemic with vision and strength, more determined than ever to lead with equity by examining everything we do through the lens of who is sitting in our classrooms today. That reality moves this discussion to an equitable access issue. Thank you for considering an alternate way to turn a well-intended, generous, but underused scholarship opportunity into a true gift to the people of Maryland, and especially to the vulnerable populations your community colleges serve. This legislation is indeed an example of Maryland “leading with equity.”

:kp