



**Senate Bill 864- Universities at Shady Grove Reginal Higher Education Center:
Designation as Community of Innovation
House Appropriations Committee
March 26, 2024
Favorable Support**

Thank you to Chairman Ben Barnes and Vice Chair Mark Chang, and the other members of the House Appropriations Committee for providing the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB864. The Universities at Shady Grove (USG) Board of Advisors, strongly supports SB864 as it would designate USG as the State of Maryland’s Regional Higher Education Community of Innovation. This legislation would improve educational attainment for underserved students; help graduates build meaningful connections with local and regional employers in key industry sectors; and strengthen Maryland’s economy. We urge the General Assembly to pass this legislation without delay and provide the necessary funding to do this vital work.

The USG Board of Advisors mission is to support the strategic growth of USG in order to serve the workforce needs of the state. We are a 36-person advisory board that includes state and county decision makers as well as our educational partners from Montgomery College and Montgomery County Public Schools. The majority of members are employers who represent the biotech and life science industries, IT and telecommunications and the regional health care industry including the national laboratories such as NIST, NIH and FDA.

For more than 20 years, along with our nine University System of Maryland partners, USG has provided accessible and affordable higher education opportunities to traditionally underserved students throughout Maryland. Of the 15,000 students who have received degrees at USG – nearly half of whom have received scholarships – 88% are either working in the region or attending graduate school in their intended field. Moreover, 77% of students who transfer to USG graduate within four years, compared to 69% of transfers across the USM.

SB 864 would help USG build on this remarkable record of achievement. As a State Regional Higher Education Community of Innovation, USG would be uniquely positioned to connect students and employers in key industries – a core component of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, which aims to increase college and career readiness for every student in Maryland. USG prioritizes the needs of “fluid” students who balance classes with family and work responsibilities, transfer from community colleges, cannot afford tuition rates at four-year colleges, and/or need more time to graduate; in other words, students for whom traditional four-year colleges are not a fit given their unique circumstances. Our model – which prioritizes equity, access, affordability and great careers – is poised to help transform higher education in our state and across the country.

Over the past two years, the General Assembly has invested an additional \$10 million in USG, which was used to develop innovative programs and practices to support student engagement and career readiness that aligns with employer needs. With the Community of Innovation designation and sustained additional funding, USG will have the ability to scale up these programs and credentials that are linked directly to meaningful job opportunities in key industries life sciences, biotech, data, cyber, teaching, and healthcare – high demand areas of Maryland’s rapidly-changing economy. With 2.4 million individuals in Maryland having had some college experience with no degree, USG is primed to immediately help fill the state’s education and workforce development gaps and drive a transformation of Maryland’s economy in the years to come.

SB 864 is endorsed by USM Chancellor Jay Perman, members of his Cabinet and the entire USM Board of Regents. They understand that an investment in USG is not simply relegated to a single campus in one county, but a commitment to the entire USM. As committed champions of USG who represent various educational and business interests across Maryland, we are proud to join them. Together, we can help USG fulfill its mission to support and serve students from all backgrounds and income levels; bring employers into their educational experience; set students up for successful careers; and drive economic growth across the state.

For these reasons, the USG Board of Advisors supports Senate Bill 864 and respectfully requests a favorable outcome.



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