

**Testimony on HB352
2024 General Assembly Session**

Dr. Daria Willis, President, Howard Community College

Good afternoon, I am Dr. Daria Willis, president at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland and representing a community of more than 22,000 scholars and rising professionals in the heart of Dragon Country.

Samantha John is a second-year student from Queens, NY. She is a hardworking public health and general studies health sciences double major who also works part time at the Starbucks on the HCC campus. She volunteers as a member of the audio-visual team at her church Hope Assembly of God in Ellicott City, and is a leader in the CRU Club, a Christian organization on campus that works to led students in bible study and fellowship.

She also volunteers as a part of the HCC Student Program Board, which develops events and activities on campus. In her words, cutting funding to HCC and other Maryland community colleges would create sudden and dramatic changes in her career and personal ambitions.

“I’d have to drop classes and it would take longer to graduate,” she says. She wants to be a medical researcher and is worried about the cost of books, tuition, and available scholarships through financial aid.

She was among several HCC students who came before you some weeks ago for student advocacy day. Her story is like thousands of other promising scholars on our campus and throughout our state, who study hard and keep an eye on the work of elected officials and how policy impacts their lives.

Education is the gateway for Maryland to fill gaps in the skilled trades and careers rooted in the traditional liberal arts and applied and social sciences. The proposed Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024 addresses balanced spending across our range of essential industries and services supported by the public trust. We applaud the governor and the legislature for navigating this challenging space.

However, as we work through what the final form of House Bill 352 will look like, it is prudent to outline those campus services, particularly at Howard Community College, which may directly impact the student gateway to success and upward mobility.

Our college is part of a coalition of amazing schools statewide increasing enrollment and impact in our local economies and communities. The proposed reduction would be among the highest in Maryland's great history, which while emphasizing strategic funding in strategic program development and capital projects, does create anxiety about gains the state has made with level Cade funding.

HCC's proposed 4.1% reduction, or almost \$1.4million dollars, would increase in-county tuition by \$10.76 per credit hour. It would freeze hiring and impact the opening of our new mathematics and athletics center, and also defer \$500K in IT upgrades. Finally, it would reduce health benefit rates for our staff to 80%, a total reduction of 12%.

At Howard Community College specifically, our work expands beyond the mission of creating pathways for success and meeting students where they dream. We address critical issues for students that can become barriers to success, including mental health support, food insecurity, career counseling and support for student parent educational access. State investments bolster our efforts in talent acquisition and facility improvement for these services.

As HCC continues to grow its enrollment to pre-covid levels and expands its capacity for teaching and learning to accommodate this growth, the state has a dual benefit in maintaining its support for all Maryland two-year institutions. Workforce development in key areas of strength for HCC will be maintained and aligned with the state's future prosperity, namely, cybersecurity and healthcare.

Second, too many families in Howard County cannot afford the region's high cost of living and do not earn enough to afford necessities. In Columbia, where Howard Community College is located, the number of families living below the threshold for Asset Limited and Income Constrained conditions while employed is 31% and growing. Since 2012, the number of households living below the poverty level in Howard County has increased 14%, and roughly one in four children enrolled in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) receive Free and Reduced Meals.

We stand in support of Maryland community college students statewide and encourage reconsideration of HB352. Thank you for your attention.