



Senate Bill 121
Yolanda S. Wilson, President, College of Southern Maryland
Position: Unfavorable Report
January 17, 2024

I am in opposition to Senate Bill 121—College of Southern Maryland - Funding and Responsibilities - La Plata Pool. The College of Southern Maryland is a nationally recognized regional community college that creates opportunities for academic credentials and workforce development for CSM students in Southern Maryland through providing access to education; momentum to reach completion; and the promise of upward social and economic mobility throughout their journey with our institution.

The College of Southern Maryland is laser-focused on our commitment to student success, our true North Star, and we fiercely protect our right and fiduciary legal duty to determine locally the allocation of resources based on our core mission and values. The statutory authority and responsibility to allocate resources from multiple sources is vested in the Board of Trustees. In doing so, it must consider and balance the interests of multiple stakeholders with the ultimate responsibility to reach decisions in the best interests of the college and its students. SB 121 is an unfunded mandate that requires the college to pay for La Plata pool renovations from our operational budget. This will affect the current and proposed budgets and impact all future funding requests.

CSM acknowledges and respects our elected officials who advocate for their constituents' desires. Likewise, I, as the president of CSM, along with our Board of Trustees must advocate and champion for the needs of our diverse students. Community colleges serve, outside of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the most vulnerable student populations, including the black and brown, first generation, LGBTQIA, low-income and justice-impacted. Our students need, and deserve, every possible resource to be successful. Simply stated, allocating CSM's funds of between \$3 million to \$20 million toward pool renovations on top of an additional \$350,000 to \$600,000 annually for operating costs does not align with the college's goal of using every possible resource to support our students and their academic and wrap-around services and needs. And, during this period of tightening the budgetary belt straps statewide, this mandate certainly does not advance sound fiscal stewardship of our institutional resources.

The La Plata Campus Physical Education Building – which houses the pool – was closed, along with all CSM campus buildings in March 2020 because of the global pandemic. In Spring 2021 – as a result of a broader building assessment and a review of customer usage that showed decade-long declining pool patronage – CSM made the difficult decision to permanently close the pool. Since Fall 2022, the Charles County community has asked about the possibility of reopening the pool.

As we think more strategically about maximizing our resources, using a collective impact model strategy is key, and joining forces with our local stakeholders to develop and support a shared solution is paramount. Since I arrived at the college in January 2023, we have engaged in continued dialogue with members of the Charles County Delegation and the Charles County Board of County Commissioner, as well as with interested residents, to find a viable solution to address the community's interest in having an aquatic facility in Charles County. Through this deliberative process, the La Plata pool was determined not to be a viable option as a recreational facility for Charles County citizens due to its age, condition, and restricted use.

Our support of, and collaboration with, the Charles County Board of County Commissioners, as evidenced in both of our recent letters from December 2023, reflects our joint commitment to supporting each other's unique missions – ours in providing exceptional educational services for Southern MD's students and the county's in delivering quality recreational opportunities to Charles County citizens.

As a regional college in Maryland, CSM has the unique Capital Projects funding formula of the state carrying 75% of the construction costs, while the specific county where the construction occurs pays 25%. SB121 circumvents this formula, placing the full cost on CSM's operational budget.

Because of the state's capital improvement project process for community colleges, CSM would never be able to renovate the La Plata Campus pool by December 2024, and in fact, in adhering to state processes and requirements of community college CIPs, the timeline would be extended one to two years. This process reinforces the need to rally behind the proposal offered by Charles County's Commissioners and allows CSM to remain mission-centered on educational training and workforce development.

I ask the members of the Senate Committee for Budget and Taxations to give SB 121 an unfavorable report.

Yolanda S. Wilson, President, College of Southern Maryland