



Senate Bill 121
Sonja M. Cox, College of Southern Maryland, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees
Unfavorable Report
January 17, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the College of Southern Maryland and in my role as vice chair of the college's Board of Trustees to speak 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. We do this by staying mission-focused. As an unfunded local mandate, SB 121 prevents the Trustees from reaching decisions that are in the best interests of the college and our students. SB 121 also diverts critical operating resources away from educational programming, resources, and services that would otherwise support our students in achieving their academic goals.

SB 121 requires the college to pay for the renovations and operations of an aging pool, built 50 years ago and now requiring significant repairs. 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%. However, SB 121 circumvents this formula, placing the full cost of the pool renovations and its operations on the college's operational budget. Further, the La Plata Pool has not been included in the vetting process as part of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges Capital Prioritization List for State funding. By circumventing this process, neither the college nor the local jurisdiction would be reimbursed for any renovation funds expended. These costs plus the associated operational costs will negatively impact the current budget and all future operational budget requests.

In closing the pool, the trustees agreed that this is a venture that CSM can neither operationally afford nor sustain. Factors the Trustees closely considered in arriving at this decision were the multiple and significant pool safety concerns that were identified during the building assessment, and other critical factors. We scrutinized declining customer usage studies over a ten-year period, and importantly the loss of associated tuition revenue from the pool due to the elimination of physical education graduation requirements.

As Trustees, we considered our fiduciary responsibility to reach sustainable, mission-focused decisions that are in the best interests of the college and its students. Besides the La Plata pool, we also examined the future of CSM's Wellness and Aquatics Center at the Leonardtown Campus which was similarly situated with operating deficits. It's important to note that the Leonardtown stand-alone facility was built in 2010, and as a newer facility features many of the now-standard amenities lacking at the 50-year-old La Plata pool, and the St. Mary's County Commissioners agreed in Fall 2021 to a phased approach for its Recreation and Parks Division to assume programming and operations of this turnkey facility to provide year-round recreational opportunities for the community.

The college has been in conversations for over a year with Charles County leaders to help identify a viable solution to address the community's interest in having an aquatic facility in Charles County. This past month, the Charles County Board of Commissioners advised the Charles County Delegation of their intentions to expedite a new competitive level multigenerational facility with a natatorium because the La Plata pool is not an option that will serve more residents and provide more amenities.

This is a local issue that is being addressed by the local jurisdiction. Further, SB 121 is an unfunded local mandate that oversteps local authority and prevents the college trustees from exercising their fiduciary responsibilities. I ask that the members of the Senate Committee for Budget and Taxations give SB 121 an unfavorable report.

Sonja M. Cox, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees, College of Southern Maryland