



**Maryland Higher Education Commission**

**Education, Energy and the Environment**

**Senate Bill 597**

**Higher Education - Maryland Graduate and Professional Scholarship Program - Eligible Institutions**

**February 19, 2025**

**1:00 PM**

**Favorable**

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 597. I am Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary at the Maryland Higher Education Commission. I want to thank Senator Corderman for sponsoring the bill

This bill would expand the Maryland Graduate and Professional Scholarship Program to include the Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine (MSOM) as an eligible higher education institution.

MSOM received conditional approval on August 28, 2025 to operate in Maryland as a private, non-profit institution. MSOM is owned and operated by Maryland-based Meritus Health (based in Hagerstown, Maryland) and is funded by the Meritus Health System. MSOM is focused on educating future doctors to practice osteopathic medicine in rural and underserved areas in Western Maryland and other rural areas of the State. They expect to welcome their first class of 90 students this July.

Per the conditions of their approval, MSOM must maintain a financial guarantee (as required by regulation), pass a second MHEC on-site evaluation at the end of their first instructional year (to ensure they remain in compliance with regulatory standards), and obtain accreditation from an accreditor recognized by the US Department of Education within eight years. MSOM achieved pre-accreditation status with the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA) on September 10, 2024.

MSOM provided the following summary in their application materials to MHEC: *MSOM is intended to serve constituents predominantly located in Maryland and the tri-state region surrounding Washington County and will be focused on rural and underserved areas in Western Maryland and other rural areas of Maryland, which will benefit from the presence of MSOM*

*students in their local practice-based and hospital-based settings. MSOM's research focus will encompass a broad array of health status and chronic illness that disproportionately impact the demographics the institution will serve within its immediate service area. MSOM will form partnerships with Maryland and other tri-state colleges to form pathway programs for prospective applicants to jumpstart their academic journey into medicine.*

MHEC recognizes the work undertaken by Meritus, Washington County's largest health care provider, to train future doctors in the area due to the physician shortage and aging physician population in the area. In closing, MHEC supports Senate Bill 597 and asks the Committee for a favorable report.