

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Education, Business, and Administration**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development**

Testimony Regarding the Higher Education Fiscal 2022 Budget Overview

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For almost 240 years, Maryland's independent colleges and universities have been part of the State's system of postsecondary education. By partnering with private, nonprofit colleges and universities, Maryland is able to serve more students in more geographic regions, offer more academic programs, award more degrees, and obtain more favorable outcomes at a lower cost for State taxpayers. In addition, most of these students stay in Maryland after they graduate and become important contributors to the state's economy and tax base. This is a successful public-private partnership that has stood the test of time.

Today, Maryland's 13 State-aided independent institutions serve more than 65,600 students in 180 geographic locations and offer 1,600 approved academic programs, including more than 900 post-baccalaureate and graduate programs. These advanced-level academic programs are essential to Maryland's knowledge-based economy. The MICUA institutions have achieved remarkable outcomes as measured by high retention rates and graduation rates, shorter time-to-degree, low student loan default rates, and top-ranked mid-career salary earnings. In 2019, Johns Hopkins University, MICUA's only doctoral research university, spent \$2.6 billion on research and development activities, issued 150 patents, fueled 24 new start-up companies, and created 1,000 new jobs. With just 3% of the State's appropriation for higher education, the MICUA institutions produce remarkable benefits and provide an incredible return on investment.

The State's investment in its independent institutions is a wise and efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Therefore, we are disappointed that the 2021 *Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act* reduces the Sellinger Program appropriation by \$29.8 million (34%) and disregards the long-standing funding relationship between the State and the different segments of higher education. Further, the BRFA continues the recent practice of level-funding the MICUA institutions in a manner that compromises the formula that ties State funding to the number of students at the institution. **We respectfully request that the Maryland General Assembly reject the BRFA and fully fund the Sellinger Program in the fiscal 2022 budget.**

The *Higher Education Fiscal 2021 Budget Overview* prepared by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) is well-written and thorough. We appreciate this opportunity to comment regarding the steps that are being taken by our institutions to assist the transfer student population, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the steps that are being taken to address education delivery and access in a remote work/learning environment.

### **Assisting the Transfer Student Population**

Our institutions are greatly interested, and heavily invested, in assisting and facilitating the transfer student population. To that end, we participate in ARTSYS, the State articulation system, and are in the process of evaluating enhanced involvement with the newly redesigned and functionally improved system that is being developed and implemented with a third-party vendor in cooperation with the University System of Maryland (USM). Further, we actively pursue various grant funding opportunities to assist these students: one of our institutions was awarded a grant in the fall of 2020 from the National Science Foundation to provide scholarships, academic support, and mentoring to a specific cohort of community college transfer students; and another institution is currently co-chairing a workgroup that is exploring grant funding to expand transfer pathways toward the attainment of a liberal arts degree. In the last year, the number of Maryland community college articulation agreements among our institutions has increased by 17% (from 159 to 186) and one of our schools has over 80 (and growing) articulation agreements in place.

Although the pandemic has had a significant impact on the transfer student population as described in the *DLS Overview*, the MICUA institutions have been aggressively creative and innovative in their outreach to these students. These initiatives have included:

- offering virtual alternating week “Transfer Talks”, or weekly Zoom “Transfer Thursdays”, to address questions and concerns;
- hosting weekly Zoom rooms for “Transfer Hangouts” where students can connect with each other and share experiences;
- attending virtual transfer college fair sessions;
- hosting multiple virtual Admitted Transfer Student Day(s) so that these students may interface with the offices of financial aid, admissions, registrars, residence life, academic life, and VA benefits even without the benefit of in-person appointments;
- increasing flexibility on various deadlines and the method of delivery for academic credentials and documents due to obstacles created by a virtual environment;
- waiving application fees;
- transitioning campus tours to online visits that include live virtual events;
- accommodating grades of pass/fail or credit/no credit;
- developing and implementing an online academic orientation program in an asynchronous format (due to the flexibility afforded through asynchronous orientation, one campus was able to have its first-ever orientation focused exclusively on veteran transfer students);
- strengthening the role of the student mentor (the lessons learned here may continue beyond the virtual environment imposed by the pandemic);
- convening admissions and transfer advising staff more frequently;
- creating sample degree plans so students have a better idea of what credits are eligible for transfer; and
- increasing financial aid support and scholarships for these students.

## **Addressing Education Delivery and Access**

The MICUA institutions have been leaders in protecting the health and safety of our students during this time of public health crisis. Eight of our institutions decided to offer only virtual instruction this fall, while five of our institutions offered a de-densified socially distant residential experience with a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction. For the spring semester, ten of our institutions are offering a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction, one will phase in a hybrid model later in the semester, and two are offering only virtual instruction. Each institution has successfully balanced the best interests of its students.

However, the plans that our schools made for fall 2020 and spring 2021 were developed following numerous workgroup meetings during which all aspects of the reopening (or not) was discussed, every stakeholder was consulted, and every potential outcome was evaluated. In contrast, in March of 2020 when the State (and the country) shut down, we had to adapt quickly to a virtual environment. In doing so, we immediately established:

- laptop loaner programs for both students and faculty with contactless checkout systems;
- the provision of additional equipment, such as webcams, and hotspots, as reliable Internet access is a major obstacle for many of our students and some faculty;
- a common online communication platform (one school provided all faculty with Zoom licenses);
- expanded technology help desk hours covering evenings and weekends to support students in different time zones and on different schedules; and
- technology grants for students to purchase equipment and pay for high-speed internet.

Later, we implemented new technology in our classrooms to allow for simultaneous face-to-face and remote instruction, provided training for faculty members who would need to use the technology, and retrofitted residence halls.

## **Financial Aid**

Finally, we note that despite the pandemic and its related challenges, we continue to prioritize the financial aid that we award and we are proud of the efforts that we have made to ensure that low-income students are able to access and afford higher education and their choice of institution. The pandemic has demonstrated that our students need financial aid more than ever. One in four of our students is a Pell Grant recipient, and over 80% of the need-based financial aid that MICUA students receive is institution-based (\$285 million in fiscal 2020); almost 90% of our Sellinger funds is used for financial aid for Maryland students (in fiscal 2020 this was \$51 million). Further, as part of the Guaranteed Access Partnership Program (GAPP), we match 100% of the State-awarded Guaranteed Access Grant so that low-income high-achieving students may receive up to \$38,400 in the 2020-2021 academic year towards their pursuit of higher education at our schools.

We are appreciative for the opportunity to offer this testimony as part of the Higher Education Overview. Please let us know if there is any further information that you require, or any questions that we can answer.