

# **The Joseph A. Sellinger State Aid Program Historical Overview**

## **The Sellinger Program: Supporting Higher Education in the Maryland Tradition**

The State of Maryland has maintained a partnership with its independent colleges and universities for over 200 years. The first higher education institutions chartered in the State were independent colleges— Washington College was chartered in 1782 and St. John’s College was chartered in 1784. The first State operating grants were provided to these institutions in 1782 and 1784. Throughout its history, the State has supported independent higher education through numerous programs. Currently, the primary State support for independent higher education is through the Joseph A. Sellinger Aid Program, which was established in 1973.

At that time, four private institutions of higher education in Maryland had closed due to severe financial hardships. In addition, the University of Baltimore—then a private institution—wrote to the State requesting a public takeover. These were the “signs of the times” for independent higher education, prompting the Maryland Council for Higher Education to warn that a severe financial crisis was imminent for many of the State’s independent institutions. In response, the Governor appointed a distinguished panel of citizens from public and private institutions of higher education and local businesses to serve on a committee to evaluate private higher education in Maryland. The Committee was chaired by Philip Pear, member of the Maryland Council for Higher Education. Hence the Committee became known as the Pear Committee.

During the summer of 1972, the Pear Committee met with every private college president in Maryland and hired an independent auditor to review the financial statements, enrollment data, staffing records, cost containment efforts, and other records of every private institution. At the conclusion of its work, the Committee recommended that the State provide modest public support of private higher education to preserve and strengthen a dual system of higher education. The panel wrote that “the savings to the State in tax dollars due to the existence of these institutions has contributed substantially to the welfare and well-being of all of the citizens in Maryland. The Committee wrote, “...continued and increased participation of the private institutions of higher education in Maryland is essential for the optimum use of public funds for the support of higher education in the State.” A moderate State investment provides for a high rate of return through degrees granted, citizens educated, and positive economic impact.

The Committee recommended the State provide grants to the eligible institutions through a formula linked to their enrollments and to the per-student appropriation of ten four-year public universities. This link between public and private institutions was established for two reasons. First, the link provides a rational basis for determining the costs of services provided by the independent institutions, and second, the link encourages cooperation and collaboration among the State’s public and private institutions of higher education.

On January 21, 1993, the State's formula to distribute aid to private colleges was officially renamed the Joseph A. Sellinger State Aid Program in an emotional bill-signing ceremony. Governor William Donald Schaefer, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., and Speaker of the House R. Clayton Mitchell Jr. signed the Act as the first bill of the 1993 Legislative Session as they stood with Father Sellinger, the president of Loyola College and a respected higher education leader.

This self-adjusting formula remains in effect today and continues to be a national model. In 1996, the General Assembly passed legislation creating a similar formula to provide grants to Maryland's 16 community colleges; thereby linking public and private, two- and four-year colleges and universities into a collaborative system of higher education to serve the diverse needs of Marylanders in every region of the State.

State law requires State-aided independent institutions to document the intended and actual use of funds provided through the Sellinger Program and demonstrate that the funds are not used for sectarian activities. Additionally, MICUA requires its member institutions to identify how the use of Sellinger funds aligns with the State goals as set forward in the *Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education*. MICUA coordinates the submissions from the State-aided member institutions by collecting and reviewing the reports from all 13 member institutions to ensure that the programs they report meet the State's usage guidelines. MICUA submits the final reports to MHEC prior to the statutory deadline and provides five copies to the Department of Legislative Services. Copies of the reports for the 13 State-aided independent institutions are available on this site.

MICUA has produced a publication, [\*More for Maryland\*](#), to demonstrate the value of State and federal investments in Maryland's independent institutions. By partnering with private, nonprofit colleges and universities, Maryland and states across the nation serve more students in more geographic regions, offer more academic programs, award more degrees, and obtain more favorable outcomes – all at lower costs for taxpayers.