

Statement by USM Chancellor Jay A. Perman on Return to Campus Advisory Group, COVID Research & Innovation Task Force

Baltimore, MD (April 27, 2020)

STATE USE OF USM ASSETS

Before I get into the bulk of my comments today, I want to share a piece of news that I think illuminates how closely the University System is working with the state and with our health care partners on an effective and compassionate COVID-19 response.

I've already shared with you how the USM has prepared an MOU template to help universities make their facilities and equipment available to the state. Well, late last week an MOU was signed allowing Salisbury University to house patients and employees from Peninsula Regional Medical Center, which is seeing an influx of COVID-19 cases.

More than 100 individuals will be housed in a Salisbury University residence hall, where they can be safely quarantined. These are patients who have contracted the disease but are now recovering, along with hospital employees. This is critical for community health because many of these patients and employees live in settings that don't allow for effective social distancing. They're often in multifamily homes, or otherwise in close quarters that prevent isolation.

Peninsula is monitoring these patients and providing any care they may need. The residence hall has already undergone a deep cleaning today, and move-in could take place as early as tomorrow.

If these patients couldn't get safe lodging at Salisbury University, they would, instead, have to be housed at a hotel on the Eastern Shore, at a cost of millions of dollars to the state. Salisbury University is also allowing use of its shuttle buses to transport patients. So I thank Salisbury University President Chuck Wight, Peninsula President and CEO Steven Leonard, Gov. Larry Hogan, and Secretary of Health Bobby Neall for getting this agreement done and for protecting the health and safety of Maryland's people.

RETURN TO CAMPUS ADVISORY GROUP

As you know, over two months, we've been consumed with decisions affecting the University System's operations through the spring semester. With eager collaboration among our university presidents, we tackled issues of instruction, administration, research, and student support. And we've done so with a uniform commitment to open communication and full transparency.

As we look ahead to summer, all USM universities have committed to online instruction for at least the first summer session. A couple of universities will soon make decisions about the possibility of offering a limited number of small, in-person experiential learning and laboratory courses over the second summer session—but, of course, only if our conditions and guidance permit it.

So now—with much of our immediate decision-making behind us—we must turn our attention to the fall semester. I imagine most of you saw a story in the *Washington Post* last week, in which I was quoted saying that I'm "reasonably

optimistic” that we’ll be able to resume in-person instruction sometime this fall.

That’s not a guarantee, of course. There are no guarantees when our situation is still so fluid and uncertain. Nor does my statement mean that if students do return to campus on a certain date, our operations will go back to normal. I’d venture that we won’t experience “normal” for some time to come. As Gov. Hogan has maintained—even as he makes plans to slowly reopen the state—this isn’t a switch we can simply flip.

All that said, I have made clear to our university leaders that I want to start planning as though students will be able to return to campus in the fall—maybe September or October. And yet I know that, in that one broad statement —“students will return”—is a staggering number of considerations, implications, and contingencies.

Therefore, I’m convening a group to draw up the conditions we’ll need to meet before students can come back to campus. Our No. 1 consideration is student and employee safety, and that will not be compromised. Of course, we’ll comply with all state and federal guidance and with workplace best practices. And we’ll aim for solidarity among our institutions balanced by their very real need for flexibility, because how universities meet the conditions we establish will vary campus-to-campus.

Making up this Return to Campus Advisory Group will be university-based leaders across our institutions, and across all aspects of our campus operations: academic affairs, administration and finance, enrollment management, public health and health care, research and development, student life. We’ll need administrators with on-the-ground experience in managing complex operations and in forecasting the feasibility, practicality, and consequences of the decisions that we put on the table.

To keep the advisory group itself relatively small, each representative will convene a separate workgroup to inform decisions relevant to his or her area—and the members of these workgroups, too, will reflect the System’s make-up in terms of institution size, type, and geography. The advisory group will also contain a representative from each of the System’s four shared governance councils.

The work of the group will center on gathering into one planning template everything we need to be thinking about, for instance: What conditions external to the System must be present before we can initiate a return to campus? What conditions need to exist on the campuses themselves? How about in the communities in which our campuses are located?

Which are conditions that we can create ourselves, and which are beyond our control? What modifications to the workplace, to the teaching and learning environment, and to campus living must be made to ensure—and to monitor—the safety of students, employees, and community residents? Which policies will need revision, which indicators should be tracked, and what conditions, if present, mean we must scale back our plans?

This planning template is intended to ensure that all of our universities are thinking about all of these same things, and are incorporating them in their own campus plans, which they’re already developing. We’re going into this process highly cognizant of the fact that our universities are very different from one another—that they have different needs, based on the students they serve; *how* they serve them; *where* they serve them. The conditions on

(and around) one campus—the facilities, the resources, the flexibility, the density—will not mirror another's. And that's why the advisory group is tasked not with making discrete decisions but with ensuring that university-based decisions are guided, and bounded, by a common set of considerations.

That said, I do want this advisory group to decide on a date—the backstop date of when students might return to campus, whatever it is—and then, from there, establish the other dates by which certain milestones must be hit to make that possible, including the return of our faculty and staff.

This entire planning process will involve cascading decisions: “If this, then that.” I believe our return-to-campus date must be our first “if,” so that we can move ahead in a concrete fashion, so that we can plan backward, and forward, from there. I say “forward” because our planning doesn't end on the return date. We have to have protocols in place that *keep* our students, our faculty and staff, and our communities safe. We must have mechanisms in place to monitor how we're doing, to assess whether certain decisions have unintended consequences, and to determine when and where adjustments need to be made.

I look forward to updating you on the advisory group's important work and the timeline for getting it done.

COVID RESEARCH AND INNOVATION TASK FORCE

I'll end my comments with an update on our COVID Research and Innovation Task Force. You might have seen my op-ed in the *Baltimore Sun* last week in which I explained why I convened the task force and why its work is so important for Maryland. The point is to advance Systemwide research and innovations that inhibit disease transmission and improve treatment, and to engage policymakers, business leaders, and entrepreneurs in this same fight.

This group will foster R&D collaborations within and outside the System. They'll help us secure resources for our work: seed grants, state and federal assistance, industry dollars. They'll help build the connections and infrastructure, the policies and protocols, we'll need to prepare long-term to address future pandemics and other crises. And they'll help us tell our story in a focused and compelling way, so that we can attract more partners and assets to this mission.

With me on the task force is UMB Interim President Bruce Jarrell; Incoming University of Maryland, College Park President Darryll Pines; UMBC Vice President for Research Karl Steiner; UMB School of Medicine Associate Dean Terry Rogers; and USM vice chancellors Tom Sadowski and Tim McDonough. Chairing the task force is Laurie Locascio, vice president for research at both College Park and UMB. Dr. Locascio's leadership is critical, and her close relationship with prospective federal partners puts us in a fantastic position to make some good progress quickly.

The group had its first meeting last week, and it was enormously productive. We agreed that our efforts will be broken down into near-term, mid-term, and long-term objectives. And we discussed a number of ideas: conducting Systemwide research webinars and cross-campus dialogues on innovation; holding business plan competitions in partnership with TEDCO, the Dept. of Commerce, and the Maryland Tech Council; engaging our USM startups and our post-doc and grad students in app challenges and innovation workshops to encourage the sharing of new ideas

and approaches; and ultimately having the System take lead on a Pandemic Research Center proposal, alongside industry and federal partners.

We know this is a watershed moment. But we know, too, that—because of that—there’s intense competition for attention, for partnerships, and for money. So that’s the balance we have to strike: the need for expediency and the need for strategy.

We have a lot of assets that will distinguish us from our peer institutions. We have incredibly exciting clinical trials at UMB, where we’re testing candidates for COVID prevention and treatment, including a study exploiting the anti-inflammatory properties of certain stem cells to alleviate symptoms in patients severely ill with COVID-19. We have deep support from the executive and legislative branches of Maryland’s government, and we agree that we should continue making the state and its people the primary beneficiaries of our work. We have several industry partnership opportunities that we’re already pursuing. And we have the strength of this entire University System, teeming with energy and expertise and great ideas. We’ll be looking to all of our institutions to contribute to the vital work of this task force.

We’ll continue to hold task force meetings weekly to identify priorities and assign tasks, so we can sustain the terrific momentum we’ve got. And I’m indebted to everyone involved in this effort. Thank you.

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