

## **Funding academic research, like UMB's coronavirus studies, must be a national priority**

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At this point in the COVID-19 pandemic, one thing is very clear: as a state and nation, we must fund research – especially at academic research institutions. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and [Development](#), government funding for academic research institutions in the United States ranks 24<sup>th</sup> out of 36 nations as a share of GDP. Couple that with skepticism and misinformation about research and science, and we are facing an uphill battle. Funding academic research institutions must be a priority.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) mission calls us to improve the human condition and serve the public good of Maryland and society at-large through education, research, clinical care, and service. Despite a quickly changing environment, I'm proud to say that UMB has been true to that mission and has served as a leader in the counterattack against COVID-19.

Because we have long studied coronaviruses, we were one of the first institutions in the United States to have samples of the novel coronavirus and we could quickly work to understand it and develop solutions to fight it. Our Institute for Genome Sciences pivoted and converted a research lab to meet the need for statewide testing and processed over a million tests. UMB was the first university in the nation to start the Pfizer vaccine clinical trial at our Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health. We also conducted clinical trials for Moderna and other potential vaccines, and are currently conducting pediatric trials for COVID-19 vaccines. In fact, on my first day on the job as president last year– September 11<sup>th</sup>, as it turns out, I received a shot in my arm as part of the Moderna vaccine trial. It was not my first time as a participant in a research trial, and likely won't be my last.

At our Student Center, UMB administered close to 40,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine of which two-thirds were given to Baltimore City residents and over 20 percent went to folks in the neighborhoods closest to our campus. We also partnered with Esperanza Center and Indian Health Service to distribute vaccines and served patients who spoke

22 different languages. Our medical, nursing, dental and pharmacy students continue to care for COVID-19 patients. Social work students and Law students are addressing many of the needs created by the pandemic, such as helping connect neighborhood children to online school and helping people file their taxes in order to receive stimulus checks. UMB's experts are guiding [local](#), [state](#), and [national](#) responses, and our work continues.

Looking back, it's apparent that the progress UMB made in the fight against COVID-19 was possible *because* of our strong foundation as an academic research institution. We are Maryland's only public health, law, and human services university. Our six professional schools and interdisciplinary Graduate School confer the majority of health care, human services, and law professional degrees in Maryland each year. We have a unique partnership with the University of Maryland Medical Center, and research at UMB is collaborative, where scientists and researchers work across disciplines to advance discoveries. In 2020, UMB's extramural funding totaled \$688 million. In addition, our BioPark is Baltimore's biggest biotechnology cluster, with three dozen tenants and more than 1,000 employees fueling the commercialization of new drugs, treatments, and medical devices. Nearby, our recently opened Community Engagement Center has served over 43,000 adults and children, and offers a variety of programs that leverage University resources to meet community-identified needs such as exercise, food, and after-school and educational programming.

My first year as president of UMB confirmed so much of what I knew about this university and how it serves Maryland. I have a renewed energy to make sure that research is possible, to prepare for what's coming next, to identify the next cures, and to prepare the next generation of health care, human services and other professionals. I call for greater funding of research and academic research institutions because the results for the greater good are immense. The COVID-19 vaccines would not have been possible without research funding to academic research institutions. UMB was built to find solutions for the problems we face, here in Maryland and beyond. I'm proud to serve as its president.

We are not out of this current pandemic and yet UMB researchers are already preparing for the next pandemic. Trusting in research means supporting objective and verifiable science, and funding research makes it possible to find solutions to address major health and scientific challenges, create economic development, and prepare for the unknown.



