

Town Hall on SB 1052: UM Strategic Partnership Act

March 11, 2016
SMC Campus Center

I thank you all for joining me today to discuss a piece of legislation before the General Assembly that could have significant implications for UMB: The University of Maryland Strategic Partnership Act of 2016.

I'll answer as many questions as I can about the bill's content, though I'll say right now—by way of apology—that I'm sure you'll have many questions that I simply cannot answer. The bill is very broad in its language, and there's a considerable amount of work ahead to figure out how we would operationalize its components.

But let me go back to the beginning, and talk a little bit about the bill as it was introduced in the Maryland Senate on Feb. 18—and what's happened to the legislation since then, which is actually quite a lot.

SB 1052 was sponsored last month by Sen. Bill Ferguson—who represents Baltimore City's 46th district—together with 11 of his Senate colleagues. The bill calls for a unified University of Maryland, with two constituent campuses—the Baltimore campus and the College Park campus.

The intention of the bill is to strengthen the partnership we began with College Park four years ago. That partnership, *MPowering the State*, has been a boon to both institutions and to Maryland itself. It's generated collaborative academic and research programs between the two universities, created joint institutes, and accelerated our tech-transfer activity, substantially growing university disclosures, patents, licenses, and startups.

I'm strongly supportive of legislation that strengthens this partnership—which Senate Bill 1052 does, in fact, strive to do. In fact, it says that the presidents of both campuses shall jointly develop and implement a plan that promotes alignment, cooperation, and collaboration between the College Park campus and the Baltimore campus.

By codifying this partnership, the legislation ensures that MPower (or a comparable successor) survives beyond current or future university presidents—that the partnership would not be dependent upon the level of support it enjoys from President Loh and me, or those who come after us—but that, instead, this tight alliance is written into Maryland law.

As I said, I strongly support this effort. I believe it's the right thing to do. And yet, when I wrote to you on March 1, I outlined those aspects of the bill that were troubling to me and to the leaders of this University.

I worried that the bill, as written, might compromise the standing UMB needs—as a full partner—to act in the best interests of this University and its people. I worried it might affect our relationships with other institutions within the University System. I worried that the bill might dilute our influence and impact in the city of Baltimore, where we've pledged to strengthen families and communities, and stimulate the local economy.

I'm deeply grateful that my concerns were heard in Annapolis, and that the bill has been amended in the Senate to take into account some of these potential consequences. So I'd like to go through just a few of our concerns with the bill's original provisions and where those provisions stand now.

Personnel

The bill originally directed the two campuses of this new University of Maryland to combine personnel systems. I was concerned that a single personnel system might not take into account UMB's unique promotion and tenure and appointment processes, and special circumstances related to clinical faculty.

The new iteration of SB 1052 strikes the combined personnel system and, instead, instructs us to promote effectiveness and efficiencies between the two campuses, including potential savings in human resources, procurement, and IT.

I've already heard concerns from many people regarding what this means terms of jobs—and job losses—at both campuses. The simplest answer is “nothing right now,” because IF this bill should pass—it now goes to the House for consideration—if the bill passes, we'd then have to begin studying the question of how to bring about efficiencies in our systems. It's much too premature to even venture what these efficiencies would look like.

Budget Priority

Another original provision in the bill allowed College Park to maintain its lead status within the University System. As the state's "flagship" campus, College Park would have retained the ability to present its budget to the governor and receive priority in funding. The Baltimore campus received no comparable opportunity.

Since then, the bill has been amended so that both campuses of the University of Maryland would be able to submit their annual budget requests to the governor and discuss with the governor how the appropriations would affect their campuses and the execution of their missions.

Center Funding

The bill establishes two centers—one on the College Park campus and one in the city of Baltimore.

The University of Maryland Center for Economic and Entrepreneurship Development, or UMCEED—based at UMCP—would provide degree and credential programs in areas of key strength for our universities: virtual and augmented reality, neurosciences, biomedical devices, data analytics, and cybersecurity.

Meanwhile, the Center for Maryland Advanced Ventures would be based in Baltimore—though it's unclear whether that means the center would reside on our own campus or somewhere else in the city. The ventures center would identify university research that's ripe for commercialization and help move it from our labs into the marketplace. Additional funding to the center would be used to encourage university startups to locate in Baltimore City.

In the bill's original provisions, UMCEED—at UMCP—would receive \$10 million in state funds each year in perpetuity, while the ventures center—somewhere in Baltimore—would receive \$4 million annually, from 2018 through 2022.

The bill's language has since been amended to remove this funding cutoff date for Baltimore's ventures center—so that center would receive \$4 million a year in perpetuity.

Research Reporting

Another provision of the original bill required the chancellor to recommend how to combine the two campuses' reporting of various indicators for the purpose of national rankings, including the reporting of our combined research dollars.

The new iteration of the bill modifies this language, so that now both presidents would recommend to the chancellor mechanisms that would permit this joint reporting.

USM Relationships

I mentioned earlier that I was concerned this bill might inhibit UMB's good collaborations with other USM institutions. In my March 1st testimony before the Senate, I specifically mentioned UMB's close relationship with UMBC, whose research enterprise has recently seen tremendous growth.

The new iteration of SB 1052 explicitly addresses such relationships, saying that nothing in the strategic partnership may prevent or restrict collaborations between the University of Maryland and its sister institutions.

Single President

Finally, there's the issue of one or two presidents leading this one University of Maryland. The original bill authorized the Board of Regents to consider submitting legislation appointing a single president for both campuses once either Dr. Loh or I stepped down as leader.

This section was later deleted and language was added reinforcing the fact that the president of each campus shall have primary responsibility for that campus.

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I do believe that these amendments give UMB stronger standing—more appropriate standing—in this partnership with College Park.

And while I do still have some lingering concerns about the framing language of this bill—that is, the long-term implications of one university with two campuses, I didn't convene this town hall to share my opinions. No, in the spirit of shared governance, I

convened this forum so that you could share with me—and with the leaders assembled here today—your questions and your viewpoints.

Your participation and candor will help me think through our position, as the bill now makes its way from the Senate to the House, and I'm granted another opportunity to testify before the legislature. I should also point out that the USM Board of Regents and the chancellor provide oversight of our University. They are its governance. And I know they care about your thinking as well.

With that, I'll open up the floor to you, listen to your comments, and answer as many questions as I can about Senate Bill 1052.