



USM Student Council Report for the USM Board of Regents

April 16, 2021

The USM Student Council is enjoying the busiest time of the spring semester while planning our first ever cross-system town hall entitled “One Year into a Pandemic Together.” This gathering includes panelists from six USM institutions and is scheduled for April, 22nd at 6pm. This Town Hall will open dialogue with a diverse panel to hear from guest speakers and students across USM in addressing the impact of COVID on students, challenges and successes over the past year, and the way ahead.

Earlier this month, we had over 25 student leaders from across the USM join our USMSC meeting with Governor Hogan’s Chief of Staff, Amelia Chasse Alcivar, and key legislative staff. We hope for this mutually beneficial relationship to grow as both the students and the policy-makers found the conversation meaningful. Topics discussed included affordability and transparency in higher education, HBCUs, student fees, environmental advocacy and shared governance.

In this vein, we would like to reiterate that the USMSC has a process to establish through majority institution vote the means to formalize and act upon USMSC stances. During the spring legislative cycle, seven bills were polled for support and/or opposition. An appendix shows the summary report from our Government Relations Committee of each bill.

Last Sunday, we gathered for our official monthly meeting where we welcomed USM Women’s Forum as well as the Maryland Department of Health Educators as our guest speakers. We did a wrap up of our spring advocacy work highlighting the seven bills the Council voted to support. We devoted time to planning transitions and reviewing bylaws to help sustain positive adaptations that emerged from the pandemic. This includes proposed provisions to ensure hybrid attendance will be an encouraged model to further of goals of wide and inclusive representation on the Council. In addition, we discussed USMSC elections for the upcoming term and strategies to improve outreach and recruitment for the soon to be vacant leadership roles.

The focus of the USM Student Council since the last Board of Regents meeting has been to help our primary areas (government relations, mental health, student fees, DEI, student affairs) gain momentum through cross-institutional membership and plans of action. Members of the USMSC leadership team are present for the Chancellor and student meet ups which have become a cherished collaboration. Moreover, USMSC collaborative work with CUSF, CUSS and MHEC continues.. An example of these collaborations includes a



USM Student Council Report for the USM Board of Regents

April 16, 2021

planned student feedback session for the in progress Academic Integrity policy similar to the session last fall focused on naming policies.

USMSC as a whole wishes to express appreciation for the tremendous work being done day in and day out by leaders at the institutional and system levels as well as by faculty, staff and fellow students during this time.

With Respect and Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annie Rappeport".

Annie Rappeport
2020-2021 USMSC President

Appendix I: *USMSC Government Relations Committee – Session Action*

Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act (HB156/SB283)

This bill is designed to increase voter participation among students and members of the armed forces. This bill requires that universities designate a university employee as a Student Voting Coordinator. They would be responsible for university actions, initiatives, and programs aimed at improving voting turnout among students. This bill also requires information regarding student voting to be displayed more prominently on certain websites and it also requires local boards of elections to obtain input from universities when designating polling locations and precinct boundaries. The initial version of the bill included a provision requiring two hours of excused absence on election day for students, however, despite a push to amend the bill to give students the whole day off, the provision was amended out in its entirety.

Jordan McNair Safe and Fair Play Act (HB125/SB439)

This bill is designed to reform Maryland's colligate athletic environment such that student-athletes receive sufficient protection. This bill ensures that student-athletes remain eligible for scholarships even if injuries or other unforeseen circumstances derail their athletic participation. This bill also ensures that player's medical needs are met, including provisions designed for financial assistance and strengthened injury protocols. This bill also includes provisions that would protect the Title IX rights of players. Finally, this bill would give student-athletes permission to profit off their likenesses.

Textbook Tax Cut Bill (HB792/SB904)

This bill would create a tax exemption period for college textbooks, allowing college students to purchase textbooks with no sales tax for two weeks out of the year. The tax-exemption weeks are situated to line up



USM Student Council Report for the USM Board of Regents

April 16, 2021

with the start of the fall college semester and the spring college semester. This bill would also cover digital course material.

Student Fee Transparency Bill (HB1295/SB895)

This bill is intended to provide transparency regarding the process of student fee creation and the use of revenues collected from student fees. This bill would require that USM institutions present information to a student committee regarding the amount of a fee, the students who would be subject to it, and the proposed use for its revenues. The bill would also require that fees revenue be retained and used by the department that imposes it unless the student committee on fees is presented with an exception for review.

Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Bill (SB521)

This bill is intended to ensure USM graduate assistants are given the ability to collectively bargain. This includes any research assistants, postdoctoral interns, or fellows. SHELRB would be responsible for new collective bargaining action authorized under this bill. Under current law, wages for graduate assistants are set by the USM with no input from graduate assistants themselves.

FUTURE Act (HB803/SB835)

This bill is intended to ensure USM campuses attain a state of carbon neutrality. Universities would be required to be carbon neutral for direct emissions and indirect emissions by 2025. Universities would also be required to be carbon neutral for induced emissions by 2035. Universities would also be required to report on their process, dedicate staff to sustainability, and report on their progress yearly. Carbon neutrality is also permitted to be met through carbon offsets rather than reduced emissions.

Hunger Free Campus Bill (HB891/SB767)

This bill establishes the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. It would be managed by the MHEC and would be required to provide matching funds to public institutions seeking to address hunger on their campus. It also requires that for every year starting in FY 2023, the Governor provide \$150,000 for the fund in his budget.

Mental Health Hotline for Student IDs Bill (HB466/SB405)

This bill requires each USM institution to provide the telephone number of Maryland's Helpline, or an on-campus crisis center that operates 24 hours a day and 365 days a year on student identification cards.

Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health in Higher Education Bill (HB244/SB161)

This bill establishes a task force that studies mental health policies and procedures in USM schools. In addition to review current mental health practices, the task force is also intended to offer recommendations to universities on how to improve their mental health services. The task force is to be staffed by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).



USM Student Council Report for the USM Board of Regents

April 16, 2021

For each of these bills and more, the USMSC Government Relations Team has worked to ensure passage through the MGA. Research, individual communication with MGA members, coordination with students and interest groups, and testimony in committee hearings were the main tools we used to help support these bills in their journey through the MGA. Although there were some setbacks this session, namely the failure to secure a full day of excused absence on election day with an amendment to the SMVEA, the Government Relations Committee still made valuable progress on a number of legislative issues and expended maximum effort in lobbying for student issues in Annapolis. We hope that in addition to the legislative goals that we completed this session, our efforts helped lay the groundwork for collaboration with MGA members in future sessions to tackle issues that were not addressed this year.

Although these nine bills were the most significant that the Government Relations Committee evaluated and acted on, there were a number of other bills that we evaluated and researched on a smaller scale. There were over twenty bills this session that had some level of impact on students within the system, and for each one of them, our committee carefully evaluated the policy outcomes and weighted the potential impact of our lobbying involvement.

We had successful session. The SMVEA, the Jordan McNair Safe and Fair Play Act, The Mental Health Hotline for Student IDs Bill , and the Hunger Free Campus Bill all appear to be on their way to successful passage in the MGA. Overall, the Government Relations Committee is hopeful that each one of these bills will make its way through the MGA, as our advocacy work promoting these bills is ongoing.