Report to the Board of Regents

Chancellor Jay A. Perman

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Thank you, Madame Chair. Good morning, everyone.

THE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

I want to start this report with an achievement that's not only notable, but one that's shared by several universities, one that's been a significant priority for this Board and for the System as a whole.

Last year, seven USM universities applied for the 2026 Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, the most coveted endorsement of a college's work to advance the public good. All seven won the distinction: Salisbury University (renewed), Towson University (renewed), UBalt, UMB, UMBC (renewed), College Park, and UMES.

The System's success on this rigorous test of community impact is rare and remarkable: Our universities joined just 232 other colleges across the country—public and private—in earning the designation this year. That's a credit to each university's institution-wide commitment to making meaningful and measurable change through community-engaged teaching, research, and service.

This commitment aligns with our strategic plan, in which we pledge to integrate civic education throughout our general education curricula and to support university-based practices that build a civic engagement infrastructure across the System.

A foundational purpose of American higher education—especially *public* higher education—is to use our knowledge, assets, and influence in service of enriching our communities; to educate our students for the obligations of our democracy; to solve, with our neighbors, the greatest challenges we face—together.

I thank the regents, who have prioritized and supported this essential work.

ADVANCING THE PUBLIC GOOD

Manifesting this community-engaged mission, Bowie State and UBalt are part of the Maryland Justice Partnership to end mass incarceration. The partnership follows on the work of the Maryland Equitable Justice Commission, whose report detailed stark disparities in Maryland's prison landscape and incarcerated populations.

Coppin State is investing in its historically Black West Baltimore neighborhood by helping employees put down roots near the school. A partnership with Baltimore City, Live Near the Nest offers employees $50,000 in down-payment and closing-cost help, with the potential for tens of thousands more through partnering programs. It's the largest homeownership program sponsored by a Maryland university—and badly needed in a city where only 43% of Black households own their own homes.

Frostburg State has long served as a catalyst for economic growth, workforce development, and community resilience in Mountain Maryland and beyond. Now the university is forming the Entrepreneurship and Innovation HUB, aligning academic expertise, applied research, and industry partnerships to support entrepreneurs, small businesses, and emerging industries across the university's tri-state region. The point is to provide coordinated services for the full innovation continuum—from first idea to product rollout to venture growth and market expansion.

UMB's School of Social Work building gets a topping-off ceremony next week, when the final steel beam will be placed atop the structure, readying it for enclosure. The building isn't only designed to net-zero and LEED certification specs; it's designed to serve as a bridge between the campus and community, with spaces that invite in partners and collaborators—and that reinforce social work's core tenet that human relationships are paramount.

Our students understand that, too. Ruba Abukhdeir is a candidate in UBalt's Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) program and a 2026 Founders' Fellow of the American Society for Public Administration. She's the only student from Maryland chosen for the honor. From an early age, Ms. Abukhdeir's life was shaped by public service, and she says the fellowship will give her a chance to connect with other public administrators and exchange ideas.

In fact, UBalt's DPA program is getting a new home base at the Universities at Shady Grove, deepening both institutions' commitment to preparing leaders for public service careers and providing accessible degree pathways for working professionals. Ms. Abukhdeir chaired a student panel at USG last night, celebrating the move.

CREATING CRITICAL PATHWAYS

Towson University is *also* teaming up with USG. Together with Montgomery County Public Schools, Towson and USG are launching an early childhood education pathway for paraeducators in the county's K12 schools. The partners are offering the bachelor's degree at no cost and using a hybrid model with online evening classes and intensive minimesters so that paraeducators can become fully licensed teachers while still working in county classrooms. With programs like this, the System *continues* its leadership in closing critical teacher shortages.

That's the very point of House Bill 479. Two days ago, USM at Southern Maryland Executive Director Dale Nesbary joined me—together with St. Mary's County Superintendent J. Scott Smith and College of Southern Maryland President Yolanda Wilson—to push for HB479's passage and build in Southern Maryland a scalable, replicable Early College program in education. Dr. Nesbary is a critical advocate, not only because the USMSM is central to an

accessible four-year education pathway in the region, but because before he came to the center, he was president of Michigan's Muskegon Community College, and with Michigan colleagues and community members, established *four* Early College programs.

Maryland also has a critical shortage of *physicians*, as does the nation. The U.S. could need as many as 200,000 primary care and 200,000 specialty care physicians in the next 20 years. To grow the pipeline, UMB's School of Medicine is upping its enrollment by 175 students next year, and by 200 over the next five years. The national accrediting body approving the school's request said it has the needed resources and infrastructure to support the expansion: faculty, facilities, clinical training opportunities.

In another bid to grow and retain primary care providers in Maryland—especially in high-need regions—the USM at Hagerstown and Meritus Health have created a physician assistant track specifically for students who plan to work at Meritus after graduating. Meritus provides a medical director for the program, as well as clinical training, and the focus is on attracting students in and around Washington County, promoting homegrown talent that stays in the region and serves the community.

SERVING THROUGH OUR SCHOLARSHIP

It's not only through service that we enrich our communities—locally, globally—it's through our scholarship, as well.

At UMBC, Kamal Seneviratne is studying the side effects that accompany lifesaving drugs. Therapeutics developed to treat HIV and cancer often come with neurological risks, from cognitive problems to painful nerve damage. A grant from the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund continues Dr. Seneviratne's work in examining how these drugs harm the brain—with the goal of developing therapeutics that are all reward, no risk.

Inspired by her own experiences with fibroids, College Park's Erika Moore is developing noninvasive treatments for common uterine tumors. Dr. Moore's lab is the first to create a 3D, lab-grown fibroid model from living cells—an innovation already showing early promise in slowing tumor growth and advancing long-overdue research in women's health. The work is funded by a grant from the MPower Strategic Partnership.

Researchers at UMCES's Appalachian Lab recently found that changes in songbirds' abundance and migration timing—often due to climate change and habitat disturbances—are causing dramatic shifts in which bird species are commonly seen together during migration. By showing how species-level processes can change an entire community, the research encourages a multi-species approach to understanding and conserving migratory birds.

New research by a College Park physicist was named a 2025 Top 10 Breakthrough of the Year by *Physics World*. UMD's Yichao Zhang and her colleagues captured an image of an atom with a level of resolution about 10 times smaller than the size of a typical atom. It's the highest-resolution image of an atom ever captured. Why is it important? The technique Dr. Zhang used

allowed her to visualize ultralow-frequency vibrations. Those vibrations hold keys to the conduction of heat and electricity and will shape how we develop next-generation quantum and electronic devices.

Several of our universities welcomed the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill passed by Congress last month. UMBC's work in precision aquaculture and flood-impact adaptation got a total of $2.5 million. Frostburg's Planetarium got $2.8 million. UMCES's Global Collaboratory got $1 million. Bowie State's work in quantum cancer solutions got $700,000. College Park's work in violence reduction got $1 million. MPower's work to end human trafficking got $700,000. A consortium including UMB, UMD, and UMBC got $3 million for research into brain disorders.

CELEBRATING OUR PEOPLE

Powering all of this progress, of course, are our people. Always.

Two UMD faculty are among just 10 nationwide winning the American Academy of Sciences and Letters' 2025 Barry Prize for Distinguished Intellectual Achievement, given to scholars who've made "outstanding contributions to humanity's knowledge, appreciation, and cultivation of the good, the true, and the beautiful." Recipient Sylvester Gates is known for his seminal work in supersymmetry, supergravity, and string theory. Prof. Emeritus Charles Butterworth has spent his career on Arabic and Islamic philosophy and the relationship between reason and religious texts. UMD was the only school last year with two Barry Prize recipients.

Towson University's Wei Yu is the first scholar in TU history to be elevated to an IEEE Fellow, among the highest honors awarded by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. The distinction recognizes Dr. Yu's contributions to security and AI in cyber-physical systems and the Internet of Things.

Salisbury University's Stephora Alberi graduated last spring with a degree in computer science. This year, she was a finalist for both the Rhodes and the Gates Cambridge scholarships, two of the most prestigious awards available to U.S. students. Ms. Alberi's day job is also pretty impressive; she's part of the research team at the University of Tartu developing Estonia's first-ever lunar rover.

Last year, Towson University music professor Jonathan Hugendubler won $66,000 on the quiz show *Jeopardy*, defeating 16-game champion Scott Riccardi. The producers—and the fans—liked him so much they invited him back. In the Champions Wildcard Tournament last month, he won another $10,000.

UMGC in Asia is leveraging AI to create more *human*-centered learning experiences. Tools like an AI-powered tutoring system are personalizing support for English language learners and improving classroom engagement. UMGC is also piloting AI solutions beyond instruction, including schedule optimization and discussion-support chatbots, to help faculty focus on

mentorship and deepen student connection. The point isn't to replace people, or replace their labor, but to amplify their impact.

The UMES Men's Volleyball Team has made history—the first Division I volleyball team at an HBCU. It's also the only D-1 men's volleyball program in the state. The team, now 7–2 in its first season, is coached by Anitra Brockman, who's one of very few women—and very few women of color—to coach a men's college team. The program has caught the eye of ESPN, now following the team for a documentary.

At UMCES, a philanthropic coalition has renewed for a second year its major investment in the Appalachian Laboratory. The donor group, TALIN, got together in 2024 with one goal: Provide difficult-to-obtain funding for new research addressing critical environmental challenges in the central Appalachians. TALIN's let's-fund-it-ourselves solution is a powerful chance to nurture novel early-stage research (and researchers) that struggle to find support, and spark innovation across the region.

At Bowie State, a landmark $6.5 million gift from Elior will support key institutional priorities centered on BSU learners—expanding their access through student scholarships and renovating their learning and living spaces to create collaborative environments that inspire community engagement and academic excellence.

FY27 BUDGET PROPOSAL

It wouldn't be a February Board meeting if I didn't update you on what's happening in Annapolis. I've been testifying in support of the governor's budget proposal for the System, in total $2.3 billion in state support, a 0.6% increase over last year's budget.

Clearly, the governor recognizes the impact of the cuts we've suffered over the last two years—cuts totaling 10% of our state appropriations—and he's responded with a proposal that keeps our budget whole.

The proposal does, however, shrink our personnel line by $29.5 million, or 1.5%, through a reduction of budgeted vacancies. And so our universities will review their vacant positions to determine which can be cut and which simply cannot. We'll continue our efforts to save costs, but given successive years of budget cuts, those savings are harder to find.

To me, this budget proposal is proof that the governor has heard our pleas to protect our people. And we're grateful for that.

But it's not the *only* thing we're grateful for. A level budget belies some significant investments. Gov. Moore is delivering on his promise to make Maryland the Capital of Quantum, and to steer investment to College Park, ground zero for Maryland's quantum ambitions. In all, $14 million goes to UMD for quantum faculty, experts, and operations.

A total of $32.5 million in new funding goes to Bowie State, Coppin State, and UMES, the fifth installment of the 2021 HBCU settlement. The budget proposal includes funding for a 1.5% cost-of-living increase for USM employees. While this pay raise is critical—given that salaries still struggle to keep pace with inflation—the System will *again* have to absorb that increase for employees not covered by state funds. That's at a cost of least $25 million next year.

The governor's FY27 proposal sustains the state's investment in the MPower alliance between College Park and UMB, with $1.5 million supporting education, research, and commercialization partnerships. By the way, on the new NSF rankings of annual research expenditures, UMB and College Park, together, rank No. 14 among all U.S. universities, a four-spot climb over last year. They rank No. 9 among publics, a welcome return to the U.S. top 10.

Of course, those rankings reflect FY24, when federal research investments were more robust and more aligned with our activity. And so we're particularly grateful for the governor's proposal to support research across the System. The $25 million he's earmarked will help our faculty sustain critical research in areas deprioritized by the federal administration *and* pivot to projects more likely to win funding.

FEDERAL RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

I do want to update you on the federal research landscape, and note, for a change, something *positive* in what we're seeing—namely, a gathering will, in the courts and in Congress, to act as a backstop against the administration's most damaging cuts.

But I can't talk about the good news without first describing the bad—the harm our research enterprise has suffered over the last year. A succession of stop-work orders, rescoped awards, and new compliance requirements has created uncertainty in the research space and bloated the time and money we spend in research administration and in grant review, defense, and litigation.

New executive orders and certifications have particularly hurt research areas that the federal administration considers out of alignment with its priorities—areas like DEI, environmental justice, global health, and health equity. In all of these areas, the USM has a history of success in winning federal funding.

Since January 2025, our universities have had 219 awards canceled, totaling $133 million. In terms of dollars lost, USM awards from NIH suffer the most, with $51 million in grants canceled, followed by the Department of Education at $19 million, and NSF at $14 million.

Given this damaging hit to NIH, it's unsurprising that UMB has absorbed the heaviest losses at $50 million, followed by College Park at $33 million, and UMBC at $21 million. But I want to make clear that every single one of our universities has had research grants canceled.

Aside from current losses, we've seen a marked slowdown in new award activity. Over the last year, the two biggest agency funders of U.S. academic research, NIH and NSF, have made fewer grants—new awards and competitive renewals—in every area of science and medicine.

That said, Congress has recently passed bipartisan minibus spending bills that reject the administration's deepest cuts to U.S. science agencies and restore budgets capable of advancing health, safety, and scientific progress. But these minibuses do more than restore agency funding; they prohibit deviation from negotiated reimbursement rates for indirect research costs. Earlier proposals to slash these rates to 15% would have devastated our research enterprise.

Of course, real risks remain: Without question, there will be lasting impacts to deprioritized research programs that won't be reinstated even if prior-year funding levels resume.

Still, we're more optimistic about our ability to weather this storm. Our earlier worst-case projection—a loss of up to $300 million over two years—could shrink with new congressional action to protect university R&D and, with it, America's longstanding scientific leadership.

And that's encouraging, because it's not only our universities that suffer when they're starved of research dollars. It's our people—from graduate trainees to established faculty—who make these research programs run. It's the citizens and communities that our research serves.

So we're doing the work to assert our leadership in the nation's most critical R&D. We're aligning our research strengths and assets with federal priorities. We're growing new research opportunities and cultivating new sponsors, public and private. We're investing our own money in protecting core research activities, while exploiting new areas of inquiry. We're investing in grant development and research administration, and supporting the people who make our research programs among the best in the world.

The USM is built for this. And I look forward to updating you on where our strength and innovation take us.

Madame Chair, this concludes my report.

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