

## Council of University System Staff (CUSS) Meeting Minutes

Date: October 14, 2025

Location: University of Baltimore — Virtual (Zoom)

Time Called to Order: 10:07 a.m.

Recorder: Kevin Bruce (UMCES)

### 10:01 Call to Order and Attendance

Chair **Roy Prouty (UMBC)** called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. following a roll call conducted by **Kevin Bruce (UMCES)**.

A quorum was confirmed.

#### Guests

**Kathea Smith (University of Baltimore)** – Vice Chair, UB Staff Senate and Governance Steering Council (attending for John Brenner).

### 10:08 - Approval of Agenda

The agenda link was shared in the chat by **Meredith Carpenter (UMCP)**.

**Change noted:** President Schmoke of UB could not attend due to a meeting with the Governor; the welcome will instead be given by **CFO Barb Aughenbaugh**.

**Motion to approve agenda:** Kim Hinds-Brush (FSU); **Second:** Trish Johnson (BSU). **Approved.**

### 10:09 - Approval of September 9 Minutes

**Motion:** Trish Johnson (BSU); **Second:** Kim Hinds-Brush (FSU).

No discussion or dissent. **Approved.**

## 4. Executive Board Reports

Chair – Roy Prouty (UMBC)

Referencing:  General Updates/Reports (Used for CC)

- Delivered a **Board of Regents (BOR) Report** (Sept 19 meeting, Salisbury) emphasizing inconsistent communication to staff across campuses—especially regarding **COLA/merit handling** and **benefit changes**—and urged improved shared-governance communication.
- Met with **Maryland Department of Budget and Management (DBM)** to advocate for non-union staff after a letter to Governor Moore from Past

Chair Kalia Patricio. DBM acknowledged concerns but offered little actionable follow-up. Subsequent outreach to the Governor's education-policy contact has received no response.

- Reported on the **Board of Regents Retreat**, covering panels on higher-education economics, political risk, and governance in disruption; retreat ended early due to a student-led protest calling for divestment from Israeli companies.
- Met with **Ellen Herbst**, Senior Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance at USM. Herbst will present a financial overview at the December CUSS meeting. This and other topics of conversation included:
  - Shared-governance influence on staff compensation/benefits (currently advisory only).
  - Lack of stipends or course-release equivalents for staff service.
  - Restrictions preventing collective-bargaining employees from attending CUSS meetings (per Attorneys General guidance).
  - Faculty/Staff Assistance and Crisis Funding programs – to be surveyed system-wide.
  - Monitoring possible impacts of the **federal government shutdown** on campus employees.

Highlighted additional priorities:

- Ensuring each campus has a **staff ombudsperson** (per prior Chancellor memo).
- Tracking compliance with **duplicative-fee elimination** directives.
- Reviewing **fall-break equity** among campuses—staff often work when students/faculty break.
- Inclusion of **regional-center staff** (Shady Grove, Southern Maryland, Hagerstown) in CUSS meetings.
- Follow-up requested on **Parental Bereavement Leave** adoption.

#### Vice Chair – Meredith Carpenter (UMCP)

Continued work improving **agenda and reminder communications** via email to keep members informed and organized. Invited suggestions for content and format improvements.

#### Secretary – Kevin Bruce (UMCES)

Confirmed **transcript capture and recording** for meeting minutes. Noted recordings are **deleted after approval** of minutes.

Minutes to be compiled locally (not shared externally) using AI transcription tools consistent with evolving **USM AI-policy guidelines**.

#### Past Chair – Kalia Patricio (UMCP)

Provided supporting comments/links in chat; no formal report.

#### Treasurer – Trish Johnson (BSU) and Member-at-Large – Kelly Cowger (SU)

No additional updates.

### 10:37 - Standing Committee Reports

#### Awards and Outreach – Brian Jara (TU) & Catherine Fu (UMBC)

Preparing the **October/November Newsletter** in Microsoft Sway format to recognize recent **Staff Award recipients**.

New award cycle underway; internal campus deadlines largely met. Committee scheduling **review sessions** for award evaluations.

Positive feedback received from campuses to inform future improvements.

#### Staff Resources and Special Projects – Dave Gutoskey (FSU) & Kevin Bruce (UMCES)

Developing a **system-wide tracking spreadsheet** documenting which institutions have implemented initiatives (e.g., duplicative fee elimination) and which have not.

Goal: create a transparent, shareable record of campus compliance and support.

Chair offered to facilitate data collection through USM Admin and Finance channels.

#### Legislative Affairs and Policy – Shannon James (SU) & Lisa Gray (SU)

**Bylaws Review:** No feedback received since Sept meeting; next step is to proceed to vote at a future meeting.

**Advocacy Day 2026:** Call for volunteers remains open. Committee coordinating with **CUSF (Legislative Chair Holly)**, and student representatives.

Seeking contacts within the **General Assembly** to arrange meetings. All CUSS members welcome to participate.

## 10:44 - USMO HR Liaison Report — Open Enrollment & Health Insurance Rates (Neena Narayanan)

**Open Enrollment** is underway. Elections for medical and prescription coverage will roll over automatically; however, **Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs)** do **not** roll over and require re-enrollment each year.

Benefit rates increased by **5%** for **medical, prescription, and United Concordia Dental** plans, while **Delta Dental** and **life insurance** rates remain unchanged. Members who added dependents prior to 2019 may be asked to re-submit dependent documentation (e.g., birth or marriage certificates) due to the system migration.

Old Benefits Sheet:

<https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/CY25%20Employee%20and%20Retiree%20Rate%20Sheet.pdf>

New Benefits Sheet:

[https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/2026\\_ERRS26\\_EmployeeRetiree\\_RateSheet\\_ADA.pdf](https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/2026_ERRS26_EmployeeRetiree_RateSheet_ADA.pdf)

Neena also noted the **elimination of the “benefits holiday”** — deductions now occur in all **26 paychecks** rather than 24. Members may direct further questions to Roy for coordination with USMO HR.

## 10:54 — Campus Highlights and Updates

**Bowie State University (BSU) – Trish Johnson:**

Reported that BSU successfully hosted its **Fall Career Fair**, which drew **more than 100 employers** and had strong student participation. The university also completed its **Founders Week celebrations**, featuring alumni panels and networking activities aimed at increasing engagement with recent graduates. BSU’s Staff Council continues to focus on **professional-development workshops** and **wellness programming** for employees.

**Coppin State University (CSU) – Sheila Case:**

Announced that Coppin’s campus renovations and security improvements are ongoing and that the Staff Senate is coordinating **employee recognition initiatives** tied to the upcoming holiday season. CSU is also reviewing staff-training needs related to updated campus-safety protocols.

**Frostburg State University (FSU) – Kim Hinds-Brush:**

Shared that FSU held a **successful Wellness Day** with strong staff turnout, introduced **new sustainability projects**, and continues to expand **career-readiness programming** for students. FSU's Staff Senate is also partnering with the Legislative Affairs & Policy Committee to co-lead **Advocacy Day 2026** planning.

**Towson University (TU) – Brian Jara:**

Reported that Towson's **Staff Senate Outreach Committee** completed the October issue of the "**TU Staff Connections**" newsletter and is preparing a winter feature on staff awardees. TU continues its **well-being and DEI programming** through fall semester engagement events.

**University of Baltimore (UBalt) – Kathea Smith:**

Representing the UBalt Staff Senate, Kathea thanked CUSS for the opportunity to participate. UBalt is celebrating its **Centennial Year (1925 – 2025)**, culminating in a **Grand Finale event on November 13**. The campus is also highlighting **faculty–staff collaborations** in its centennial storytelling campaign and continuing efforts to strengthen shared-governance visibility.

**University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) – Anthony Weldon (acknowledged):**

No formal report was presented; attendance was noted and participation in discussion recorded.

**University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) – Roy Prouty (Chair):**

Shared that UMBC will host an upcoming **professional-staff development retreat**, continues to refine **campus shared-governance frameworks**, and is coordinating with CUSS leadership on communication-improvement initiatives.

**University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) — Namrata Ram-Andriessens:**

Reported several recent **university accomplishments and institutional accolades**. No policy updates were discussed.

**University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) – Chenita Reddick:**

Highlighted a lively **Founders Week (Sept 15 – 18)** featuring **Rev. Jamal Bryant** as keynote speaker. Promoted the **Hawk Hysteria** pep rally and announced **Homecoming ( Nov 2 – 9 )** themed "*Hawks Friday After Next.*"

**University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) – Kevin Bruce:**

The UMCES Staff Council reported a successful Staff Retreat that was performed in a hybrid fashion, Zoom between Lab conference rooms. President (Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm) presented the importance of in-person Staff meetings.

Reported continued work modernizing the **UMCES intranet and IT systems**, integrating digital tools to streamline onboarding, and supporting multi-site connectivity between research labs and administrative staff.

**University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) – Kathleen Hebbel:**

Described a **virtual Homecoming 2025** engaging students across **Asia, Europe, and U.S. military installations**, and UMGC's role in launching **Talent Capital**, an **AI-driven regional workforce platform** linking displaced federal employees in the DMV region with job-training and education opportunities.

**Salisbury University (SU) – Kelly Cowger & Shannon James:**

Shared updates from SU's Staff Senate emphasizing **legislative collaboration** and **Advocacy Day coordination** with the CUSS Legislative Affairs & Policy Committee. The SU campus is also advancing **wellness and staff-recognition initiatives** throughout fall.

**11:29 — UBalt Welcome & Campus Report — Barbara Aughenbaugh (CFO & VP for Business Affairs)**


Chair Roy welcomed **Barbara Aughenbaugh** and turned the floor over for remarks.

Aughenbaugh conveyed greetings on behalf of **President Schmoke** and praised CUSS's advocacy — calling out the group's work on **duplicative fees** — before framing the “**interesting times**” in higher education: **state appropriations**, **federal policy/funding**, and **public sentiment** (the “three legs of the stool”) are all under pressure, requiring close campus-finance engagement and rapid adaptation.

She encouraged members to **partner with campus government-relations teams** and to advocate for **no further cuts** to USM during the upcoming session.

UBalt highlights: **Centennial year (2025)** with a **grand-finale event on Nov. 13**, and a centennial site shared in chat.

On funding changes, she noted UBalt has managed a few **grant adjustments** by providing **notice** and attempting **internal placement** for affected staff; their largest grants (public-policy areas) have **not yet seen major impacts**, though long-term uncertainty remains.

 Transformative Learning | UBalt 100

## 12:12 - Subcommittee Breakout Reports

### Special Projects Subcommittee

The Special Projects Subcommittee, led by **Dave Gutoskey (FSU)** and **Kevin Bruce (UMCES)**, discussed progress on a comprehensive Excel tracking sheet designed to document which USM institutions have implemented key system-level initiatives such as duplicative-fee elimination and ombudsperson appointments. Kelly reviewed the draft spreadsheet but noted that access must be shared through Dave's account so members can populate their campus information before the next meeting. Members agreed that the sheet should also include a column to record which graduate or professional programs do **not** qualify for tuition remission, after it was learned that several programs (e.g., UMCP MBA, UMB MD and DDS, and Frostburg's Ed.D.) are excluded from the benefit. The group emphasized the importance of communicating such information through HR offices so employees and dependents can make informed decisions about educational benefits.

Discussion expanded to concerns about rising health-insurance premiums and the loss of the annual benefits holiday, with participants stressing that staff often learn of changes through CUSS rather than official campus communication channels. Members urged HR departments and system leadership to improve top-down communication about benefits updates. They also agreed to add questions to the tracking sheet to capture whether campuses were notified of the benefits schedule change (from 24 to 26 pay periods). Despite concerns over shrinking benefits, participants expressed continued commitment to higher education and its mission, while recognizing the need for system-wide transparency and advocacy for staff welfare.

### Awards & Outreach Subcommittee

Present: Brian Jara, Catherine Fu, Danielle Hill, Kara Kauffman, Rubin Stevenson

**Awards:** Brian will send out a survey to schedule grading review sessions in early November.

**Outreach:**

The upcoming newsletter will feature a column from Roy, a brief thank you to Kalia, and the BoR Award winners bios and (hopefully) photos. Perhaps we can also include the awards schedule and one campus article?

Cathy will survey the group to see if 1-2 folks would like to work with Kara to learn Sway, our new newsletter tool.

### Legislative Affairs & Policy Subcommittee

By Law discussion, will draft notes/options to send to exec committee prior to Joint Councils. Mostly discussed options on voting. Questions arose regarding absent institutions and also has voting ever truly been evenly distributed amongst institutions?

#### Proposed Bylaws Changes-2025

Kim Hinds-Brush (FSU) and Shannon James (SU) will co-chair advocacy day planning with the support of the LAPC and hopefully CUSF and USMSC support also.

### 12:30 - Adjournment

Meeting adjourned following committee reports and discussion of next steps. (Exact adjournment time not recorded.)

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### Final Action Items Summary

Action Item	Responsible Party	Due Date / Next Steps
Share benefits summary; confirm campus HR communication on OE & rate changes	All CUSS Representatives	December 2025 Meeting
Populate <b>Special Projects</b> tracking sheet (fees, ombudsperson, tuition-remission exclusions)	Special Projects Subcommittee	Before December 2025
Identify graduate/professional <b>tuition-remission exclusions</b> ; ensure HR transparency	Special Projects + Campus HRs	Ongoing
<a href="https://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVII/VII410.pdf">https://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVII/VII410.pdf</a>		



Collect feedback on staff award cycle for next newsletter	Awards & Outreach Subcommittee	November 2025
Draft <b>bylaw</b> options (voting, absent institutions) and send to Exec before <b>Joint Councils</b>	Legislative Affairs & Policy Subcommittee	November 2025
Plan <b>Advocacy Day 2026</b> (coord. with <b>CUSF &amp; USMSC</b> )	Kim Hinds-Brush & Shannon James + LAPC	In progress
Confirm updates on ombudsperson coverage, bereavement leave, regional inclusion for Dec. session	Executive Committee	December 2025

### Links from Chat:

- UBALT 100 :  Transformative Learning | UBalt 100
- CUSF/CUSS/USMSC Joint Councils Meeting: RSVP DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2025: [RSVP Form](#)
- Proposed By-Laws Changes:  Proposed Bylaws Changes-2025
- Tuition Remission Rules: <https://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVII/VII410.pdf>
- CUSF: <https://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/SystemFaculty/>
- CUSF By-Laws: [https://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/SystemFaculty/CUSF\\_Bylaws\\_v1804.pdf](https://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/SystemFaculty/CUSF_Bylaws_v1804.pdf)
- Old Benefits Sheet: <https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/CY25%20Employee%20and%20Retiree%20Rate%20Sheet.pdf>
- New Benefits Sheet: [https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/2026\\_ERRS26\\_EmployeeRetiree\\_RateSheet\\_ADA.pdf](https://dbm.maryland.gov/benefits/Documents/2026_ERRS26_EmployeeRetiree_RateSheet_ADA.pdf)