



March 30, 2012

## **2012 LEGISLATIVE SESSION NEARING CONCLUSION – BUDGET CONFERENCE COMMITTEE AND POLICY ISSUES AWAIT FINAL RESOLUTION**

As reported last week, Senate and House budget writers will now move to reconcile the differences between the two chambers' spending plans in conference committee. University System of Maryland (USM) and campus officials will monitor and report on these proceedings as information becomes available.

Policy issues remain ongoing and USM staff and campus government relations officers are still monitoring several pieces of legislation.

**House Bill 439**, the Maryland Health Improvement and Disparities Reduction Act of 2012, will be heard in Senate Finance Committee at 1 p.m. April 3 (Tuesday). The bill establishes a process for the designation of “Health Enterprise Zones” (HEZs) to target State resources to reduce **health disparities**, improve health outcomes, and reduce health costs and hospital readmissions in specific areas of the State. The bill also authorizes incentives for “Health Enterprise Zone practitioners” who practice in an HEZ, including tax credits against the State income tax.

**House Bill 529**, which would allow local jurisdictions to assess stormwater fees to USM institutions, will be heard in the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee at 1 p.m. April 4 (Wednesday). The bill allows state-owned property to be subject to county or municipal **stormwater** management charges – except for property of the Maryland Department of

Transportation, including roads managed by MDOT. Property owned by the USM would be exempt from such charges until October 1, 2014.

Also on April 4 in the Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, **House Bill 679 – Cultural Competency and Health Literacy** – will be under consideration. HB 679 expands the Cultural Linguistic Health Care Provider Competency Program to encompass all health care professionals, including pharmacists and health educators, rather than providers and renames the program accordingly. By December 1, 2012, universities, colleges, and higher education programs for specified health professionals must report to the General Assembly and the Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities on the courses that have been developed independently or through collaboration with the office as required under the bill.

On Tuesday (April 3<sup>rd</sup>) **Senate Bill 261** creating the **Northeast Maryland Higher Education Advisory Board** will be heard in House Appropriations. The Advisory Board main goals include:

- Assisting and supporting the development of higher education in Cecil and Harford counties;
- Assisting in setting the missions of and accomplishing the goals and objectives of the four-year institutions of higher education that offer Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) approved undergraduate and graduate programs in Cecil and Harford counties (sites);
- Advising the HEAT Center, site coordinators, and the supervisory staff to whom the coordinators report on programs offered and facility utilization;
- Providing guidance and support in identifying institutions and programs to serve higher education and workforce needs in Cecil and Harford counties;
- Assisting with the marketing and promotion of programs offered at the HEAT Center and sites; and
- Facilitate interactions among the business, nonprofit, education, and military communities.

An amendment expresses that it is “the intent of the General Assembly that the Higher Education and Conference Center at HEAT located in Aberdeen, Maryland change its name to the Northeast Maryland Higher Education Center.”

**Senate Bill 843** is in House Appropriations Committee at 1 p.m. April 3. SB 843 modifies provisions regulating fully **online distance education** programs. The bill requires an institution of postsecondary education that enrolls Maryland students in a fully online distance education program to register with MHEC within 6 months.

An institution required to register with MHEC must be accredited by an accrediting body recognized and approved by U.S. Department of Education and also meet a number of specified financial conditions and business practices, including complying with the student refund policy and procedures established by MHEC. MHEC must make public and post on its website (1) a list of registered institutions of postsecondary education that

offer fully online distance education programs in the state; and (2) the names of institutions for which MHEC denied or revoked registration. MHEC may also impose various penalties on institutions that fail to comply with the bill's requirements.