

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

April 23, 2025
10:00 a.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Wednesday, April 23, 2025 via video teleconference (Google Meet).

Commission members present:

Catherine J. “Cassie” Motz, Chair	Ray Serrano, Ph.D.
Chike Aguh, Vice Chair	Rebecca Taber Staehelin
Kathleen Bands, Ph.D.	Sheila D. Thompson, Ph.D.
Mickey L. Burnim, Ph.D.	Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.

Commission members absent:

Charlene Mickens Dukes, Ed.D.	Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.
Barbara Kerr Howe	Praise Alayode, Student Commissioner

Staff members present:

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.	Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D.
Bryson Barksdale	Samuel Durai Pandian
Anthony Reiner	Kimberly Smith Ward
Al Dorsett	Daniel Schuster
Victoria Johnson	Deborah Ing
Shayla Hunter	Geoffrey Newman
Alexandra Nguyen	Elena Quiroz-Livanis
Thomas Waters	Alexis Merriman
Khia Poteat	Lyndsay Silva, D.P.A.
Glenda Abney	Tiffany Majors
Alexandra Chaillou, Ph.D.	Brittany Martin
Cara Martinez	Derrick Coley
Jennifer Fischetti	Kristin Clarkson
Rose Robinson	

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Motz** at approximately 10:00 a.m. A meeting quorum was established with eight (8) out of twelve (12) members present.

Chair’s Remarks

Chair Motz welcomed everyone to today's meeting and noted that the order of a few of the agenda items will be changed, due to the scheduling constraints of different individuals. She also wished a happy Administrative Professionals' Day to MHEC's administrative assistants and thanked them for their contributions to the Commission.

Secretary's Remarks

Secretary Rai thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the Commission meeting today. He remarked that April was Community College Month. Commencements are also around the corner, and the recent struggles of international students continue. Later this week, he will be speaking at an event celebrating International Education Day. He then gave an overview of the meeting agenda, and thanked the Commissioners for their guidance and strong support.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Commission Meeting Minutes Approval

Commissioner Burnim made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 23, 2025, and **Commissioner Taber Staehelin** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Federal Policy Update – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized **Secretary Rai** who asked Mr. Kamal Essaheb, Senior Advisor and Director of Immigrant Affairs, and Ms. Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Deputy Secretary, to provide this update. Mr. Essaheb mentioned three (3) topics. Student visa cancellations are now numbering in the thousands. Reasons for the cancellations are not given clearly to the students. In Maryland, there are dozens of students affected in 3 or 4 institutions. Secondly, the Maryland General Assembly recently passed House Bill 1222, which designates public education institutions as "sensitive locations". The designation affects how the institution handles a visit from an immigration enforcement officer. The Attorney General would be developing guidance for this. Lastly, there is an effort by the Department of Homeland Security to revamp the SAVE system, which is a database run by the federal government that verifies immigration status. The system would also be able to flag when someone was applying for federal financial aid. The Commissioners asked questions about Mr. Essaheb's presentation.

Ms. Quiroz-Livanis presented additional updates, including the creation of different work groups on civil rights and immigration to respond to changes in federal policy. The Governor's Office has organized a weekly call on Fridays to discuss what is currently happening in various state agencies and any need to coordinate a response. Additionally, a bi-weekly call with segmental leadership has been helpful for communication and sharing information. The Governor's recent bill will also help to support federal workers. Other items were shared as well.

Update on the Maryland State Plan for Higher Education – Information Item

Vice Chair Aguh shared an update on the Maryland State Plan for Higher Education. The State Plan will identify three (3) important elements:

- 1) Present and future higher education and research needs.
- 2) Present and future capabilities of different institutions and segments of postsecondary education in the State.
- 3) Long-range & short-range objectives and priorities for higher education, and methods & guidelines for achieving and maintaining them.

In terms of external engagement, there will be targeted discussions with key partners (such as advocacy organizations and institutional leaders) in the spring and summer. Meetings with a steering committee (a cross-sector group) will take place in the summer and fall.

Presentation by J. B. Holston – Information Item

Vice Chair Aguh introduced Mr. J. B. Holston of Elevate Quantum (a regional initiative) to share a presentation. From his experience, he talked about some key lessons learned, such as building enduring coalitions and securing Governor and legislature buy-in. He also highlighted quantum industry lessons learned, including building out a state-of-the-industry picture and identifying a key federal point person and stakeholders. Additionally, Mr. Holston shared lessons learned in terms of university roles and business roles. The Commissioners asked questions about Mr. Holston's presentation.

Department of External Relations – Legislative Session Wrap-Up – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Derrick Coley, Executive Director of External Relations, to share some highlights from the 2025 legislative session. House Bill 473 / Senate Bill 269 passed, expanding eligibility under the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship Program. House Bill 704 / Senate Bill 597 also expanded eligibility under the Maryland Graduate and Professional Scholarship Program to include certain students attending the Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine. There was also legislation passed to assist students who are parents or pregnant. Additionally, there was interest and focus this session on students with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – Approval of Proposed Amendments to COMAR 13B.08.20 – Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship Program – Action Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Geoffrey Newman, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration, who asked Mr. Al Dorsett, Executive Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, to present this item. During the 2022 legislative session, changes were made to the Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship Program administered through the Maryland Higher Education Commission by the Office of Student Financial Assistance (Ch. 209/HB 24). The legislative changes expanded eligibility for the scholarship beginning with the 2023-2024 program application period to include part-time students as eligible to apply to the program as well as expanding the years of eligibility for up to 6 years for students enrolled part-time.

Under the current regulations, part-time applicants are excluded and undergraduate students are considered full-time if they enroll in at least 12 credits. Graduate students are considered full-time if they enroll in at least 9 credits. The proposed regulations have been updated to include program eligibility for part-time applicants, update the definition for both full-time and part-time enrollment for both undergraduate and graduate students, and expand the maximum timeframe a part-time student may be eligible for the award.

The proposed amendments have been approved for legality by MHEC's Assistant Attorney General as required by the Maryland Administrative Procedure Act and are now ready for the Commission's review and approval. Upon approval, the proposed regulations and regulatory amendments are submitted to the legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR), after which they are submitted to the Division of State Documents (DSD) for publication in the Maryland Register. After a public comment period, they may be brought back before the Commission for final adoption.

Mr. Dorsett recommended that the Commission: (1) approve for publication in the Maryland Register the proposed regulatory amendments to the Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship Program; and (2) authorize its Assistant Attorney General to make non-substantive edits to the proposed regulations to conform to the stylistic and formatting requirements of AELR and DSD.

Commissioner Burnim made a motion for approval, and **Commissioner Thompson** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – Scholarship Awarding Update – Information Item

Mr. Dorsett provided some scholarship awarding updates. The FY 2025 budget for the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship was reduced from \$15 million to \$13.5 million. There were also changes brought about by legislation, which expanded eligibility for part-time students and students enrolled in a non-credit vocational certificate programs. The FY 2026 budget for the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards Program increased to \$138,664,752. GA (Guaranteed Access) awarding will begin no later than May 2025. The Commissioners asked questions about Mr. Dorsett's presentation.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – Update on FAFSA Completion – Information Item

Mr. Dorsett presented an update on the current status of FAFSA completion in Maryland, comparing rates of completion between different FAFSA cycles. For the 2024-2025 FAFSA cycle, the rate of completion was 34.3%, compared to the 2025-2026 FAFSA cycle when the rate was 47.1% (as of April 11, 2025). MHEC has been actively working with MSDE (Maryland State Department of Education) to promote FAFSA completion.

Department of Finance and Administration – Update on FY 2025 and FY 2026 Budget Actions – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Newman to present this item. During the 2025 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly took several actions on both the FY 2025 and the FY 2026 budgets. He highlighted some decisions made on both funding levels for the programs, as well as language added to the budget requesting that the Maryland Higher Education Commission report on programs within the budget.

Update on Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Information Item

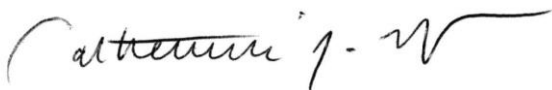
Chair Motz recognized Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, to present this item. An initial implementation plan was submitted and approved in 2023. The 2024-2027 Implementation Plan was submitted in August 2024. There is also a Joint MSDE/MHEC Plan specifically on supporting teacher preparation plans, which has been submitted and is currently under review.

Immediate and forthcoming work includes the development of a targeted outreach/communication campaign for specific initiatives, as well as coordinating efforts with new partners (like unions, LEAs, community colleges, and apprenticeship leaders). Continued and new engagement includes standing meetings with groups like Education Deans & Directors and specialized meetings, like with MSDE, MHEC, and GWDB on career pathways.

Adjournment

Commissioner Burnim made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and **Commissioner Thompson** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

Approved by the Commission:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine J. Motz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair