Joint Councils of the University System of Maryland

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, November 20, 2025
Time: Morning session (approx. 9:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.)
Location: Stamp Student Union, Atrium
University of Maryland, College Park

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Attendees (partial list)

- **Board of Regents**
  - Regent Isiah (Ike) Leggett
  - Regent William (Bill) Wood
  - Student Regent Risa Barami

- **USM System Leadership**
  - Chancellor Jay A. Perman
  - Assistant Vice Chancellor for Government Relations Andy Clark

- **Campus Leadership**
  - President Darryll J. Pines (University of Maryland, College Park)

- **Joint Councils Leadership**
  - Roy Prouty – CUSS Chair
  - Ryan King-White – CUSF Chair

- ○ Jefferson Vasquez Reyes – USMSC President

- **Council Representatives**
- Members of CUSF (faculty), CUSS (staff), and USMSC (students) from USM institutions and regional centers.

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1. Welcome and Opening

- Joint Councils leadership welcomed attendees to College Park and framed the morning as an opportunity to:

    - ○ Hear from the Board of Regents and System leadership.
    - ○ Share updates from the three councils.
    - ○ Receive a legislative preview and plan for coordinated advocacy.

- Housekeeping notes were given regarding the agenda, break times, and lunch-hour advocacy discussion.

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2. Board of Regents Panel

2.1 Introductions

- Regents and the Student Regent introduced themselves, including:
    - ○ **Regent Bill Wood:**
        - Proud UMD alumnus, UMB School of Law graduate, former practicing attorney in Rockville.
        - Serves as Treasurer of the Board of Regents.
        - Committees: Finance; Governance & Compensation; Intercollegiate Athletics; Audit; Education Policy; Chair of Research & Economic Development.
        - Noted he has been advised to "learn how to say no," but emphasized he loves the impactful work of the Board.

    - ○ **Regent Ike Leggett:**
        - Former Montgomery County Executive (12 years).
        - Shared educational background and connection to higher education governance.

- ○ **Student Regent Risa Barami:**
  - ■ Undergraduate student at UMD.
  - ■ Described her academic focus and role representing students at the Board level.

2.2 Progress in the USM and Its Institutions

Question to Regent Wood: What progress have you seen in the Board, USM, and institutions over the years?

Key points:

- Since the creation of the USM in 1988:
  - ○ Board expanded from 17 to 21 members (including 4 student regents).
  - ○ System currently includes 12 universities and 3 regional higher education centers.
- University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) has:
  - ○ Grown significantly in size and quality.
  - ○ Achieved strong national rankings (e.g., top-20 public by *U.S. News & World Report*, top-10 public by *Forbes*).
- Visible progress in facilities and infrastructure:
  - ○ Extensive construction and redevelopment along US-1 and on campus seen as signs of growth and success.
- Regents benefit from:
  - ○ Participation in campus events (e.g., athletics, ceremonies) and engagement with students, faculty, and staff.
- Recognition of key constituencies:
  - ○ Students as the most important group.
  - ○ Faculty for educating and mentoring students.
  - ○ Staff for keeping the enterprise running.
  - ○ Appreciation expressed to all three groups.

2.3 Federal Policy, Academic Freedom, and Access

Question to Student Regent Barami and Regent Leggett: How have shifts in federal policy affected higher education, and how is the Board advocating for public university systems and academic freedom?

Student Regent Risa Barami – key points:

- **Access & Affordability:**
  - ○ Federal funding constraints and hostility toward some student aid programs shift more responsibility to states.

- ○ Importance of USM's relationship-building in Annapolis; credit given to Vice Chancellor Susan Lawrence's team for mitigating potential cuts.

- **Advocacy Role of the System:**
  - ○ Example: Proposed 15% cap on indirect cost rates for certain federal research grants, with significant impact on College Park and other institutions.
  - ○ College Park and Johns Hopkins filed suit; USM should be an ally and strategic partner in such actions.

- **Academic Freedom & "Do not obey in advance":**
  - ○ Cited Tim Snyder's *On Tyranny* and the lesson "Do not obey in advance" as a guide for resisting pre-emptive self-censorship.
  - ○ Emphasized that the System has remained firm in its values and should avoid capitulating before mandates are clear.

Regent Ike Leggett – key points:

- **External Nature of Challenges:**
  - ○ Major budgetary and policy pressures are largely external to USM and even to Maryland (federal fiscal and policy environment).

- **"Size of the pie" vs. division of the pie:**
  - ○ Stress on structural deficits and the limits of balancing budgets purely through redistribution.
  - ○ Without sufficient overall resources, choices become more painful (e.g., higher taxes vs. higher tuition/fees).

- **Need to diversify Maryland's economy:**
  - ○ Overreliance on a narrow economic base is a vulnerability; USM must help diversify the economy.

- **Perspective from local government experience:**
  - ○ As Montgomery County Executive during the Great Recession, oversaw multi-billion-dollar budget reductions and layoffs.
  - ○ Initially managed by freezing vacancies, but eventually real people were affected; emphasized the human cost of cuts.

- **Guiding principles going forward:**
  - ○ Protect research that cannot simply be stopped and restarted.
  - ○ Protect as many jobs as possible
  - ○ Avoid tuition increases that would significantly undermine student access.
  - ○ Accept that some projects may need to be delayed.

2.4 Role of the Student Regent and Partnerships

Question to Student Regent Barami: How do you ensure student voices are heard, and how can faculty and staff partnerships support that?

Key points:

- **Two main responsibilities:**

  - **Uplifting organic student advocacy:**
    - Regular campus visits include meetings with leaders and open listening sessions available to any student.
    - Clarifies that she speaks as an individual regent, not for the entire Board.
    - Works to connect students with the right decision-makers (student government, campus administration, System offices).

  - **Bringing student perspectives into Board issues:**
    - Chooses interventions carefully to maintain impact and credibility.
    - Uses stories and examples from listening sessions to humanize Board decisions and highlight consequences.

- **Faculty and staff as partners:**

  - Faculty and staff often better understand governance structures and can help students navigate what is campus vs. system, policy vs. implementation.
  - Encouraged faculty/staff to help demystify decision-making processes.

- **Irony of the role:**
  - Much of student regent's time is spent in rooms without students, making intentional outreach essential.

2.5 Regents' Closing Comments

- **Regent Wood:**
  - Reiterated the importance of student regent input.
  - Welcomed Chancellor Perman and thanked the Joint Councils for hosting the panel.
  - Expressed appreciation for opportunities to engage directly with students, faculty, and staff.
- **Regent Leggett:**
  - Emphasized realism about fiscal and structural challenges, but remained optimistic about the System's ability to come through stronger.

- ○ Used the example of the Purple Line project as a long, difficult but ultimately successful effort grounded in persistence and unity.

- **Student Regent Mirani:**
    - ○ Noted that public trust in higher education is at an all-time low.
    - ○ Argued that trust is rebuilt through everyday actions demonstrating how universities serve their communities, not just through "grand gestures."
    - ○ Praised those in the room for the daily work they do in this regard.

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3. Council Reports (High-Level Summary)

Note: The transcript segment included extended reports from the faculty, staff, and student councils. Content is summarized here for minutes purposes.

3.1 Council of University System Faculty (CUSF)

- Report highlighted:
    - ○ Work of **Awards Committee** (staff/faculty recognitions, Board of Regents awards, communications).
    - ○ **Policy and Academic Freedom efforts**, including podcast work on AI and academic freedom.
    - ○ A detailed **campus safety report** prepared in conjunction with other members and committees.
    - ○ Ongoing collaboration with Legislative Affairs on reviewing proposed policy changes and their impact on faculty.
    - ○ Consideration of governance rules and guidelines for online/hybrid operations and resolutions.

3.2 University System of Maryland Student Council (USMSC)

Report from President Jefferson Vasquez-Reyes:

- **New Meeting Structure:**
    - ○ Separate **Graduate Council** and **Undergraduate Council** to focus more deeply on each group's needs.
    - ○ Graduate focus: research issues, program size, engagement across all 12 universities and 3 regional centers.
    - ○ Undergraduate focus: daily student experience and impact of federal and state policy changes.

- **Campus Updates:**
  - Many SGAs and GSAs report that earlier issues are being addressed or resolved.
  - Increased engagement and larger assemblies due to targeted initiatives.

- **Directors' Initiatives:**
  - **DEI Directors:** launching affinity social media posts and campaigns.
  - **Student Affairs Directors:** preparing advocacy/leadership webinar series.
  - **Government Affairs Directors:** planning pre-session meetings with legislators and coordinating for USM Advocacy Day.
  - **Communications & Marketing:** significant increase in social media reach and engagement (large percentage growth since September 2025).

- **Student Concerns & Boundaries:**
  - Some student groups have raised issues such as divestment; USMSC has clarified the limits of its jurisdiction and directed them to appropriate channels (e.g., foundations, campus bodies).
  - USMSC remains committed to listening to all students and conveying concerns to Regents and System leadership, even when issues are outside direct authority.

- **Organic Engagement:**
  - Jefferson highlighted conversations with students on campus (e.g., a freshman at Salisbury) as examples of how students are experiencing positive transitions and opportunities.
  - Emphasized gratitude for faculty and staff mentors across the System.

3.3 Council of University System Staff (CUSS)

Report from Chair Roy Prouty:

- **CUSS Structure:**

  - Represents ~13,000 non-exempt and exempt staff who do not have collective bargaining.
  - Each campus may send up to six elected representatives, including a designated point-of-contact for campus–System communication.
  - Cycle begins each August; membership rosters typically solidify by September/October.
  - Meetings alternate between virtual and in-person and include general business plus three committee breakouts:

- ■ **Awards & Communications Committee:** Regents' Staff Awards, newsletter, media presence.
- ■ **Staff Resources & Special Projects:** follow-through on action items and ongoing projects.
- ■ **Legislative Affairs & Policy:** review of Board policies impacting staff; monitoring state and federal legislation affecting staff and higher education.

- ● **Executive Board:**

  - ○ Chair (Roy), Vice Chair, Past Chair, Secretary, and two Members-at-Large (Trish and Kelly) help keep operations running.

- ● **Key Issues Under Discussion:**

  - ○ **Reciprocal communication and best practices**
    - ■ Interest in sharing successful approaches to campus–System communication with senior leadership.
    - ■ Recognized variability among campuses and the need to reset expectations as leadership changes.

  - ○ **Crisis funding / emergency assistance for staff:**
    - ■ Noted that student and faculty emergency funds exist on some campuses; staff support is inconsistent across the System.
    - ■ Highlighted UMBC's "UMBC Cares" emergency fund, administered through HR and University Relations, as a model.
    - ■ Working with System Administration and Finance to explore best practices and potential expansion.

  - ○ **Duplicate fees and tuition remission:**
    - ■ Following a June 2024 memo from Chancellor Perman, campuses are working to reduce duplicate fees charged to employees using tuition remission (e.g., parking fees bundled with mandatory charges).
    - ■ Staff continue to verify where duplicate fees may still be occurring and work with presidents to resolve them.

  - ○ **Ombuds services for staff:**
    - ■ Referenced a 2018 memo on best practices for campus ombuds services.
    - ■ Recognized uneven awareness and access across campuses.
    - ■ CUSS is gathering information on existing practices to facilitate broader implementation.

- ○ **Compensation / recognition for governance work:**
  - ■ Staff report varied interpretations of whether they can receive stipends or other compensation for significant shared-governance service.
  - ■ CUSS aims to clarify and share best practices; recognized that faculty and student leaders sometimes receive compensation while staff often do not.

- ● **Closing Theme:**
  - ○ Staff are committed to supporting the USM mission and want to be fully included in decision-making alongside faculty, students, and senior leadership.
  - ○ CUSS looks forward to ongoing collaboration with all councils and leadership.

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4. Legislative Preview – Assistant Vice Chancellor Andy Clark

Presenter: Andy Clark, USM Office of Government Relations

4.1 Framing the 2026 Session: "Triathlon" Metaphor

- ● **Swim Phase (Early Session):**
  - ○ Disorienting start; "cold water" with shifting political and fiscal currents.
  - ○ Key events: committee organizational meetings, delegation meetings, joint fiscal briefing, higher education overview.
  - ○ Goal: find rhythm before exhaustion sets in.

- ● **Bike Phase (Mid-Session):**
  - ○ Long, sustained effort: bill introductions, budget projections, midyear negotiations.
  - ○ Budget committees will hear the USM FY 2027 operating and capital budget overview.
  - ○ Endurance and strategic pacing are crucial.

- ● **Run Phase (Late Session / Toward Sine Die):**
  - ○ Accelerating pace: bills on the floor, amendments, cross-filed bills moving in both chambers.
  - ○ Mental resilience is decisive.

4.2 Fiscal Context and Budget Pressures

- USM base operating budget has been cut by >$210M over two years (~10% reduction).
- Structural deficit for the state projected at ~$1.4B in FY 2027, rising to ~$3.9B by FY 2031.
- Federal headwinds have:
    - Rescinded or canceled >$100M in anticipated federal funding statewide.
    - Removed ~43% of USM federal research funding in some categories (approx. $43M).
    - Imposed a 15% cap on indirect cost rates for certain grants, potentially reducing cost recovery by tens of millions of dollars.

4.3 Impacts on Students and Research

- Changes to federal loan programs:
    - Elimination or capping of some parent and graduate PLUS loans.
    - New borrowing limits and repayment structures with potential impacts on graduate and professional students, particularly at institutions with large populations of veterans, first-generation, and low-income students.

- Graduate research assistants:
    - More than 2,200 GRAs across USM; federal funding changes threaten both current research and pipeline development.

- Rescinded and capped research funding:
    - Significant impact on NIH-funded institutions (e.g., UMB, UMCP) and on statewide research capacity.

4.4 Government Relations Role and Joint Councils' Engagement

- USM Government Relations office:
    - Coordinates advocacy, tracks ~3,000 bills, and typically testifies on ~50.
    - Works closely with campus government relations staff (State Relations Council).
    - Manages joint chairmen's report responses and interim studies.

- **Key dates and actions:**
    - Session runs Jan 14 – Apr 13, 2026.
    - All 188 legislators are up for re-election, heightening political stakes.
    - Joint Councils Monday morning legislative calls (9:00–9:30 a.m.) start Jan 12 and continue through April 6.

- USM Government Relations newsletter available via online sign-up; recommended for ongoing updates.
- Emphasized that public universities are "the crossroads" where societal challenges converge and that sustained investment is essential for USM to fulfill its mission.

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5. Chancellor Jay A. Perman – Remarks and Q&A

5.1 Opening Remarks

- Expressed appreciation to Joint Councils for their service on top of day jobs.
- Reiterated belief that, despite challenges, USM will "be standing on the other side" once current crises pass.
- Indicated he would respond to pre-submitted questions and then open the floor.

5.2 State Budget and Impact on Personnel

- **Budget Strategy:**
  - Prioritize cuts to non-personnel operating expenses and deferred maintenance before any personnel actions.
  - Last year, focused on eliminating vacancies rather than layoffs.
  - Acknowledged that unfilled positions increase workloads for remaining staff.

- **Looking Ahead:**
  - With >$200M in prior cuts, fewer non-personnel options remain.
  - Additional significant cuts may affect jobs; the Chancellor was candid about this possibility.
  - Emphasized advocacy with the Governor and legislature: USM is not the problem but part of the solution.

5.3 System Heterogeneity and Shared Services

- USM's strength lies in its diversity of institutions; it is "not 12 McDonald's."
- That heterogeneity:
  - Makes USM more attractive and effective statewide.
  - Means not every campus will or should address issues in exactly the same way.
- Commitment to:
  - Seek common solutions and shared services where they improve quality and reduce cost.

- Avoid imposing one-size-fits-all mandates that undermine local context.
- Ask the USM community to tolerate some ambiguity inherent in this approach.

5.4 Research, Academic Freedom, and Federal "Compacts"

- Expressed concern over decreased federal investment in science and its human impact.
- Stated that USM:
  - Will continue to insist on merit-based review and academic freedom.
  - Will not accept "sweetheart deals" that compromise fundamental principles.
  - Is willing to engage in dialogue about improvement but only through true conversation, not unilateral "compacts."

5.5 Employee Retention and Wage Compression

- Retention and compensation decisions are primarily campus-level responsibilities.
- System-level role:
  - Provide policies, frameworks, and data (turnover, exit interviews, surveys).
  - Encourage competitive compensation and strong benefits to the extent budgets allow.
- Wage compression between supervisors and staff:
  - Must be addressed locally; USM will continue reviewing compensation structures and sharing promising practices.

5.6 Shared Governance and Transparency

- Board policy on shared governance is robust; the System believes in it and uses it as a performance metric.
- Chancellor reviews shared governance effectiveness annually with presidents, using data from councils.
- Personal experience:
  - Recounted early experiences as faculty and dean; shared that faculty councils consistently improved his proposals, even when conversations were tough.
- Improvement area:
  - "Closing the loop" after councils provide input or recommendations.
  - New meet-and-confer policies are being implemented; accountability for feedback must follow.

5.7 Protecting Communities in the Current Political Climate

- Acknowledged anxiety among students, including international and immigrant students, and their families.
- Reaffirmed USM's core values:
  - Equity and inclusion, access, academic freedom, scientific inquiry, international collaboration, freedom of expression, and rule of law.
  - Values are not revised with each change in federal administration.
- Campuses are:
  - Ensuring community members know what to do if immigration enforcement appears.
  - Working with the Attorney General's office and courts where appropriate.
- Concluded that USM is committed to upholding its values while complying with the law.

5.8 Q&A Highlights

- **Shared Resources and Autonomy:**
  - Chancellor noted both formal shared-services initiatives and informal "systemness" (research leaders and staff reaching out across campuses).
  - Aim is to formalize and publicize useful informal practices to benefit all institutions.
- **Business Climate and Startups:**
  - Commenters noted Maryland's ranking for business friendliness.
  - Chancellor agreed that USM must support economic diversification, entrepreneurial activity, and faculty startups.
  - He cited roles on statewide boards and partnerships focused on leveraging research for economic development; acknowledged more work is needed.

6. President Darryll J. Pines – Remarks

6.1 Welcome & Institutional Momentum

- Welcomed attendees with playful roll call of USM mascots; recognized campuses without mascots (e.g., UMB).
- Thanked:
  - Chancellor Perman for leadership.
  - Student Regent (Dhruvak "Drew" Mirani).
  - Joint Councils leaders, including Jefferson and Roy.
- Noted that 2025 has been a challenging and "very long" year for higher education, with frequent federal policy changes and guidance.

6.2 Grand Challenges & Strategic Plan

- Upon starting as president in July 2020 (during the pandemic), saw opportunity to reimagine UMD's role in addressing the "grand challenges of our time."
- Developed **"Fearlessly Forward"** strategic plan with four pillars:
    1. Tackling humanity's grand challenges.
    2. Investing in people and communities.
    3. Reimagining teaching and learning.
    4. Advancing the public good through partnerships.
- Invested ~$30M in 50 challenge-oriented projects.

Highlighted project: Maryland Initiative for Literacy & Equity (MILE)

- Focus: improving reading proficiency among Maryland 3rd–4th graders.
- Data: 15–20% of Maryland 3rd/4th graders not reading at grade level; state ranked below Mississippi on some measures.
- Collaborative team from multiple UMD colleges and Morgan State University.
- Uses neuroscience and new teacher training methods.
- Recent statewide reading and math scores show improvements, with gains attributed in part to this work.

6.3 Student Affordability & Debt Reduction

- When Pines started:
    - ~16–17% of UMD undergrads were Pell-eligible; goal set to reach mid-20s.
- **Terrapin Commitment:**
    - Need-based aid program focused on lowest-income Maryland families.
    - ~$50M invested over three years, supporting >8,000 students.
    - Covers full tuition and fees, and sometimes room and board.
- **Additional aid & results:**
    - Maryland Promise Program ($30M) supports a second band of lower- and moderate-income students by matching scholarships with aid.
    - Pell-eligible share now ~22–23%; goal of 25%.
    - ~70% of graduates now leave with **no loan debt** (up from 59%).

6.4 Institutional Resilience and Federal Actions

- Outlined a four-part strategy:
    - **Engage** federal and state delegations about university impacts.
    - **Challenge** problematic policies through litigation (in coordination with USM and Attorney General).
    - **Adapt** operations and policy to comply while preserving mission as much as possible.

- - **Listen** to campus stakeholders and feed concerns back into decision-making.
- Research impacts:
  - UMD conducts ~$800M in research annually.
  - Lost roughly $30M in federal grants/contracts affecting 60–80 PIs.
  - Some young investigators and research faculty have been particularly affected.
- Response:
  - Joint letters from MPower leadership (UMD/UMB) to faculty describing internal bridging support.
  - Targeted support for professional-track research faculty to help them pivot and rebuild funding portfolios.

6.5 AI and the Future of Teaching & Learning

- Noted that generative AI is a uniquely fast-moving technology; nothing comparable in his 30 years in higher education.
- UMD held an AI-focused retreat in fall 2021, a year before ChatGPT, which allowed early strategic thinking.
- Established **Artificial Intelligence Maryland (AIM) Institute**:
  - Coordinates AI research, curriculum, and policy across 12 schools/colleges.
  - Encourages departments to incorporate AI in ways appropriate to their disciplines.
- New/updated programs:
  - Human-centered AI program rooted partly in philosophy and humanities.
  - AI-focused programs within computer science and other technical fields.
- Teaching adaptations:
  - Grants to faculty to redesign courses with AI in mind.
  - Some courses now assign lower weight to homework (where AI use is likely) and more weight to in-class assessments and authentic work.
- Administrative uses:
  - AI-powered "virtual assistants" and tutors for students in selected courses.
  - Multiple chatbots for student services.
- Ethical AI:
  - AIM working on ethical and policy frameworks for AI, including bias, equity, and accountability.
  - Exploring collaboration with Big Ten peers on an ethical AI initiative.

6.6 Closing

Reiterated that higher education remains a powerful force for good and that partnership across USM institutions is key.

- Thanked councils and participants for their work, and closed with, "Go Terps."

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7. Break and Next Steps

- Meeting paused for a break with instructions to reconvene at **11:50 a.m.**
- Lunch-hour session planned to continue the **Advocacy Day** discussion with Andy Clark and Joint Councils leadership.

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8. Action Items (From This Portion of the Meeting)

1. **Joint Councils & Government Relations**

   - Participate in weekly Monday morning legislative update calls during the 2026 session.
   - Coordinate Joint Councils Advocacy Day plans with USM Government Relations, particularly around constituent–legislator matching.
   - Encourage council members to subscribe to the USM legislative newsletter.

2. **Campus Governance Bodies**

   - Continue to identify and share best practices for:
     - Reciprocal communication between staff/faculty/student bodies and senior leadership.
     - Crisis/emergency funding programs for staff, drawing on models like UMBC Cares.
     - Reducing duplicate fees associated with tuition remission.
     - Ombuds services and supportive conflict-resolution mechanisms for staff.

3. **Student Engagement**
   - Support Student Regent and USMSC efforts to hold open listening sessions on campuses.
   - Faculty and staff to assist students in understanding governance structures and policy decision pathways.

4. **Shared Services & Systemness**
   - Campuses and System Office to continue exploring opportunities for shared services in administrative and research support areas.
   - Research leaders to build on existing cross-campus collaborations and share successful models with the wider System.

5. **AI & Teaching**
   - Faculty encouraged to review and, where appropriate, adapt curriculum and assessment structures to account for AI tools.
   - Departments interested in AI-related initiatives to coordinate with AIM Institute and campus leadership.