



# COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY SYSTEM STAFF

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CUSS Newsletter

April 2026

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## Letter from CUSS Chair Roy Prouty



In my last message, I wrote about why we show up to the shared governance table...even when we don't hold the final authority on policy. I noted that without our persistent voice, key decisions are made in an information vacuum. Over the last few months, the Council of University System Staff (CUSS) has been actively filling that vacuum at the system level, bringing your most pressing concerns directly to university presidents, the Chancellor, and the Board of Regents.

Right now, I know that many of our campuses are navigating challenging financial realities. While competitive wages and access to benefits are always top-of-mind, a general lack of awareness concerning our universities' budgets is currently dominating campus conversations. We understand that reorganizations and position evaluations are sometimes necessary. However, unannounced changes and a lack of regular, clear budget updates generate understandable anxiety. Rumors quickly fill the void, which can erode the fundamental trust between employees and leadership.

We raised this directly with system leadership, stressing that a lack of clear conversation does more damage to morale than outright bad news. The response was receptive. The Chancellor agreed that communication is vital and has suggested that all university presidents explore offering a "University Finance 101" initiative to help concerned staff clearly understand how university budgets are constructed and allocated. From here, understanding can be reached and we can all begin to more effectively advocate for positive change and transparency. We will continue pushing for this level of transparency across the system.

Beyond budget concerns, your CUSS representatives have been working tirelessly on several other fronts to safeguard and support staff:

### **Recent Advocacy and Updates**

- **Campus Safety and ICE Protocols:** We brought forward the distress and alarm felt by many regarding potential Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) presence on campuses, and the lack of clear procedures for staff. In response, the Chancellor has formed a dedicated workgroup (which we sat on along with students and faculty) to develop better communication strategies. Maybe you have already seen various "Know Your Rights" documents floating around your campus.
- **A Voice in Annapolis:** On February 18, we successfully held the 2026 Joint Councils Advocacy Day. Alongside our faculty and student counterparts, we met with key legislators on the Budget & Taxation and Finance Committees to fiercely advocate for the value our system brings to the State of Maryland.
- **Progress on Staff Support:** We are thrilled to share that a system-wide ombuds service request for proposals is moving forward, bringing us closer to providing this crucial resource for campus employees. We are also continuing our conversations with the University System of Maryland Office of Administration & Finance to finally address the issue of duplicative fees (some campus employees are being doubly charged for fees when seeking to use tuition remission), and to clarify options for staff to receive extra compensation for their shared governance leadership roles on our campuses.

- **Celebrating Staff Excellence:** The CUSS Awards Committee has completed its review for the annual Board of Regents Staff Awards. Winners have been notified, and we are incredibly excited to celebrate their outstanding contributions at the upcoming April ceremony.

### **Make Your Voice Heard!**

We can only advocate effectively when we know exactly what you are experiencing on the ground. CUSS is currently administering the 2025 State of Staff Shared Governance Survey. If you are a staff member participating in shared governance on your campus, talk to your staff leadership about how you can contribute – each campus handles this differently!

Also, consider running for one of your campus CUSS seats! Each campus handles their elections differently, so find your staff shared governance leaders for more information.

### **That's it!**

CUSS representatives will keep showing up, they will keep asking hard questions, and they will keep advocating for the transparency and support the 13,000 of us across the system deserve.

## Feature - Joint Councils Advocacy Day





***Oh, what fun! Joint Councils Advocacy Day in Annapolis***

On February 18, members of CUSS (staff), CUSF (faculty) and USMSC (students) met in Annapolis for the annual Joint Councils Advocacy Day (JCAD). Our goal was to see the Maryland General Assembly in action, meet legislators and advocate for USM funding for the year ahead.

After securing parking, I headed to our “home base” in the Lowe House Office Building. The place was humming! It was “DD Day” with several groups advocating on behalf of folks with developmental disabilities. (And the Alzheimer’s Association friends were whooping it up in the adjoining room.) Once in our room, I grabbed a pastry and got settled. It was great to see my fellow CUSSies, but also fun to chat with faculty and students from other USM campuses.

Various legislators— as well Susan Lawrence from the USM Office of Government Relations— stopped by our room to give us their spiel and answer questions about what they do during the legislative session. Then it was our turn to move: Groups of us visited legislators' offices to put a face to USM and advocate for funding. (Pro tip: Bring a student with you! Legislators love hearing from students.) The two legislators that I visited were quite different in home region and political outlook, but we had good discussions about the importance of USM and the value of educational funding.

We saw the beginning of a Maryland Senate session in the morning. (We were recognized as guests in the chamber. Fame!) In the afternoon, before a budget hearing for the Education and Economic Development Subcommittee, I chatted with some AFSCME reps and a woman running for Congress. (Chancellor Perman, who had visited us earlier, answered questions from lawmakers in the subcommittee meeting.)

I didn't know what to expect, but what a fun day! Thanks to the JCAD planning committee who made it all happen. In short, when it comes to visiting Annapolis during the legislative session: Get there early. Have your "elevator pitch" ready for why you're there and why USM funding matters. Be amazed and grateful that so many people are working hard for the people of Maryland. Enjoy the different experiences and have fun!

*Cathy Fu*

## New Digital Accessibility Rule

### What you need know

On April 24, 2024, the Department of Justice (DOJ) introduced a new rule on digital accessibility <sup>1</sup>under Title II of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), mandating that university web content and mobile apps, including academic course materials, comply with specific digital accessibility standards by April 24, 2026. This includes meeting the <sup>2</sup>W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, Level A and Level AA success criteria.<sup>3</sup>

To support this transition, USM has launched the USM Digital Accessibility Hub<sup>4</sup>, offering campuses valuable resources and guidance to develop and implement compliance plans. Here, you'll find "How-to Guides," discipline-specific resources, and more. For example, UMCP has created the "DIY Six Essential Steps of Digital Accessibility<sup>5</sup>" poster, outlining key steps for creating accessible online content. We encourage campus community members to consult their Division of IT to explore available resources and understand specific timelines. Instructors

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/24/2024-07758/nondiscrimination-on-the-basis-of-disability-accessibility-of-web-information-and-services-of-state>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.usmd.edu/digital-accessibility/>

<sup>5</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Tc9FKGxalibHQif1C3SWXSLovihZE2XJ/view>

should also be aware of how these rules apply to instructional content within learning management systems and digital media used in classrooms.

To tackle this new rule, start by identifying helpful resources like Grackle Docs<sup>6</sup>, which can check your documents' accessibility and provide an "accessibility score." Utilize AI tools to review materials and suggest updates to align with the new standards. While this may seem daunting, remember, it's about progress, not perfection! Let's take one step at a time to ensure an inclusive digital environment for everyone.

*Suzanne Ashour-Bailey*

## USM Staff Resource Share



### **Maryland Paid Family & Medical Leave Program Coming July 1**

A major statewide initiative is on the horizon as Maryland prepares to launch its new Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (PFML), set to take effect July 1. This upcoming rollout is a significant focus for USM.

The new program will offer employees up to 12 weeks of state-paid leave for circumstances like those covered under FMLA—including caring for a family member with a serious health condition or addressing one's own medical needs. Unlike traditional FMLA, employees will not be required to use their own accrued leave, as the benefit is funded through the state program.

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.grackledocs.com/en/check-a-document/>

More details will be shared through campus HR offices and benefits teams, with additional updates expected this spring.

*Antoinette Shannon*

Contact Us



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<https://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/SystemStaff/>