

**SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH,
EDUCATION, AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

February 8, 2008

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

February 13, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT
MICKEY L. BURNIM**

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Mickey Burnim, President of Bowie State University. I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the Governor's FY 2009 budget. The faculty, staff and students of Bowie State University are very appreciative of the Governor's commitment to higher education and we certainly thank you for your continued support of the work we are doing at our campus.

I especially want to thank you for the work you did during the special legislative session. It was certainly an unusual and, probably, difficult time for you. You and your colleagues had an unenviable task. Know, however, that we at Bowie State University appreciate your hard work and the benefit that we will derive from it. The bold and courageous step you took in creating a dedicated funding stream for higher education speaks volumes about your commitment to ensuring that higher education remains affordable and accessible for Marylanders.

When I appeared before you last year for the first time, I shared with you some of the challenges we were facing and some of the plans we were putting into place to tackle those challenges and move the university forward. Let me now update you, briefly, on some of our progress over the past year, and then I will comment on the issues and recommendations made by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) and answer any questions you may have.

New Strategic Plan

One of the first steps that we took in an effort to chart the university's course for the future was to establish a broad-based campus committee to lead the process of refining and revising the university's strategic plan. I am pleased to notify you that a new strategic plan has been adopted and embraced by the campus community. This new plan serves as a guide for our future progress. Many people have commented to me, some of you included, that Bowie State University has such great potential. We intend to realize that potential and are working hard toward that end. Our new strategic plan will guide our efforts. The plan includes six goals:

- Provide high-quality and affordable academic programs and support services for all students;
- Support growth by enhancing recruitment, access and retention efforts University-wide;
- Promote regional economic and workforce development;
- Increase the University's external funding;
- Promote effective and efficient use of institutional resources; and;
- Enhance the university's image.

We are making progress in many areas. I will highlight just a few.

Enrollment & Growth

This past fall, we exceeded our enrollment target by enrolling 5,404 students, and we believe that we are on track to see a significant improvement in fall-to-spring retention. Enrollment at Bowie State had been declining for the past several years. Clearly, the future of Bowie State depends upon our ability to attract new students and retain more of those students to graduation. Last year, I created an Enrollment Management Leadership Team, comprised of my entire cabinet, and I charged this group

with providing strategic direction and monitoring of all aspects of enrollment and retention efforts to ensure that we meet our enrollment goals. This group is leading the effort to create an aggressive enrollment plan which will have as a major component a plan for retention.

Nearly 70 % of our students come from Prince George's County. We would like to expand our reach beyond the county and even beyond the state in order to enroll a more diverse population of students. We believe that a more diverse racial and geographic mix will enhance the educational experience of all students and make us more attractive to students looking for a high quality, affordable higher education.

This past December, we were very excited to hold our first winter commencement in seven years. Governor O'Malley delivered the commencement address – his first address at a four-year institution. We conferred 199 degrees. This is significant because it is part of our effort to move students toward graduation sooner.

We still have work to do but I am pleased with the results we are seeing and feel good about our future prospects. I hope that you will help us in these efforts by supporting the Governor's FY 2009 allowance; in particular, the Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF). We have been designated by the University System of Maryland as a "growth institution" and Bowie State's proposed share of HEIF funding includes \$779,736 for enrollment growth. These funds are critical for us as we try to accommodate more students.

With your support we will also use \$350,000 in HEIF funding for enhancements aimed at closing the achievement gap and workforce creation and development. As you know, we have a long history of producing Registered Nurses (RN) to Bachelor of Science Nurses (BSN) nurses. We began a restructured nursing program this past fall in our efforts to add new nurses to support Maryland's workforce. The additional HEIF funding will be used to further enhance our nursing program.

Certain mathematics and science courses often constitute a retention hindrance for underrepresented minorities to persist beyond the freshman year. We are participating in a national project to re-design those math and science courses that support our nursing program, and we expect to increase retention and graduation rates among nursing majors.

We recognize that students have many choices when they decide to go to college. We can have the greatest academic programs and facilities, and most reasonable tuition, but if our students do not feel welcome and do not get the kind of service that says to them “we are glad you are here”, then we will likely be frustrated in our efforts to grow our enrollment.

I mentioned last year that I had established a task force to look at ways to improve communications throughout the campus. The task force completed its work last summer and made several recommendations. One recommendation was that we provide customer service training to our staff, particularly those persons with direct interaction with our students – staff who work in the Admissions, Registrar and Financial Aid Offices, for example. We hired a trainer and have already seen good results. We are far from perfect, but I have heard far fewer complaints from students about the manner in which they are treated. We all understand our service mission and we are working very hard to fulfill it. This remains a priority for us.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Closing the achievement gap is a major priority for the University System of Maryland and a critically important one; Chancellor Kirwan has referred to this as a “moral obligation.”

I was pleased to be able to participate in USM’s symposium on student success last fall and fully embrace the goal of cutting this gap in half by 2015. Bowie State will be developing a plan with implementation steps and I think there are several things we can do and are doing to narrow the achievement gap and help students succeed. We try to create a nurturing environment for students and show them that we really care about their success. We have stepped up our efforts to provide quality academic advising through our Academic Advisement Center and we are committed to providing tutoring and academic support that is geared toward academic excellence.

We are grateful for the support we have received over the past several years through the Access and Success program. Among other things, we have used this funding to provide summer bridge programs and we are seeing promising results indicating that, with extra help, students are better

prepared to meet the academic demands of college. We are also seeing an increase in the average credit course load for students, suggesting to us that these students are more likely to graduate within the six-year window.

Retention and graduation rates are a major priority for the University. We are committed to putting into place the necessary resources and measures to improve these rates. Financial aid is critically important in helping to turn these numbers around. We know that many students drop out or “stop out” because they cannot afford to continue. Hence, we are focusing on raising more money so that we can provide more institutional aid for our students. I urge you to support USM’s and MHEC’s efforts to increase financial aid.

Fundraising and Outreach

We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from Governor O’Malley and the legislature. Certainly, we recognize that we have to supplement that support with external funding. As you know, Bowie State does not have a strong history of private giving. As a former teacher college, we do not have a huge stable of alumni benefactors. These are challenges we must face and we are prepared to do so. I have made fundraising a priority. I reconstituted our External Relations Division into a new Institutional Advancement unit with strong leadership and a more intense and strategic focus on raising money.

We will soon embark upon our most ambitious fundraising effort to date. Through *The Campaign for Bowie State University* – we will reach out in an unprecedented manner to alumni, friends and corporate partners. The Campaign will reconnect BSU alumni to their *alma mater* in meaningful ways that will inspire them to invest in the University. We see our capital campaign as a major vehicle for securing more private funds for student support. The more financial support we can provide our students, the better chance we have of retaining them. Moreover, being able to offer more scholarships will be an effective tool in our efforts to recruit more students. So the capital campaign is a major undertaking for us.

I am also proud that Bowie State University raised \$22,214 from 259 donors in support of the 2007 Maryland Charity Campaign. This amount is an increase of 80% over what was raised in 2006. The total number of faculty and staff that contributed to the campaign nearly doubled last year’s number.

I mention this because I think it is a reflection of the enthusiasm and sense of renewed spirit that seems to be permeating throughout the campus. I believe we are on the right track and poised for even more progress.

Too many people told me when I first arrived at Bowie State that the university is a “best kept secret.” We do not want to be a secret, so we are working aggressively to market the university like never before. We just launched a new website and we are expanding our reach into the community. I am looking forward to re-establishing our Board of Visitors and I expect this group of leaders to play a major role in our efforts to increase support for the university.

Fiscal Responsibility

As you may know, one of the more difficult challenges I faced when I arrived at Bowie last year, was the financial health of the institution. We took steps to deal with this situation. First, we revised our internal budget process to be more transparent. In addition, we have developed a framework to allocate resources internally and assign priorities for funding. We have improved the oversight of our budget and worked with USM to enhance our business processes. Consistent with these efforts, we have re-aligned the use of OCR funds to address some of the university’s deferred maintenance needs. For example, \$1million of this year’s OCR funding will be used to replace the roof of the Thurgood Marshall Library. Another \$180,000 will be used to replace obsolete computers in the library and \$41,000 will be used to increase wireless access points in the library.

Chancellor Kirwan has pointed out that the strength of USM’s fund balance is necessary for the System to maintain its AAA bond rating. The financial situation at Bowie State in past years did not permit the institution to transfer 1% of its unrestricted revenues to the fund balance. This year, I am pleased to report that as a result of improvements in the management of our resources, we were able to join our sister institutions in meeting this requirement.

A recent audit by the Office of Legislative Audits disclosed several issues related to the business processes at Bowie State University. You should know that when I arrived at the university last year, I asked the University System to assist us in examining our business processes. We are using the

results of the legislative audit, along with recommendations from the business process review, to take necessary corrective action and improve our business practices. The two reports will provide a framework to further enhance the university's financial management, strengthen the financial health of the institution and position the university for future growth.

We have pledged to operate the university in a transparent, fiscally responsible and prudent manner consistent with our core values: *Excellence, Civility, Integrity, Diversity and Accountability*. We want the Governor, members of the General Assembly and potential donors as well to know we do not take investment in us for granted. We are committed to being good stewards.

Conclusion

Finally, we have also committed ourselves to operating a "greener" university as well. We think it is important to do our part to preserve the environment and we look forward to joining the Governor and USM in this effort.

It has been an exciting year for us. I am excited to have in place a new leadership team. I am encouraged by our enrollment numbers and the prospect of future growth. We are connecting with our external stakeholders who have embraced the university and our students and we are pleased with the increased visibility we are enjoying. Most especially, we are grateful for the support the legislature has provided. With your continued support, we will make even greater progress in fulfilling our mission to provide access to higher education.

We strongly urge you to reject the recommendation to reduce USM's general fund appropriation by \$6.8 million. Such a reduction would affect us significantly. First and foremost, it would seriously hurt us in our efforts to provide more financial aid to our students. This, of course, will negatively impact our recruitment and retention efforts. A reduction in our appropriation would also mean that we would have to delay several renewal and replacement projects planned for FY 09.

As I mentioned, we were so pleased that the General Assembly and the Governor created the Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF) as a way of

providing a dedicated revenue stream for higher education. That support, as I understand it, is supposed to be above and beyond our normal general fund appropriation. So to help us with one hand, and then take away from us with the other, it seems to me, is inconsistent with the intent of the HEIF fund and the extraordinary effort it took to pass the legislation creating it. I hope you will reject the recommendation to reduce USM's general fund appropriation.

COMMENTS ON ISSUES RAISED BY LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

1. *The President should comment on the anticipated decline in tuition and fee revenues in fiscal 2008 despite the enrollment growth in fall 2007.*

BSU Comments

As you may know, I arrived at Bowie State University in September 2006. This was after the university's FY 2007 budget was already approved and in place. During the middle of the fiscal year, the university, with staff from the University System of Maryland, performed an assessment of the institution's enrollment projections. Although the assessment confirmed the projection of an enrollment increase, it also revealed the university's enrollment would not increase at the projected rate. So, we reduced the university's expenditure budget to better align our spending with anticipated tuition and fee revenues. The basis for our current year's budget is more reflective of our projected enrollment growth. Therefore, the revenues for fiscal year 2008, which is based on enrollment projections, continue to show enrollment growth but not at the rate that was originally projected at the start of fiscal year 2007.

2. *The President should comment on measures being taken to increase the amount of need-based aid offered at the university.*

BSU Comments

There is no question that we need to do more to increase need-based aid. As was mentioned in my earlier testimony, we are making this a priority and are using our capital campaign as a major vehicle for raising additional aid dollars.

3. *The President should comment on future plans to increase maintenance staff.*

BSU Comments

The university agrees with the issue raised by the analyst concerning the need to increase maintenance staff. These positions are a major component of the university's plan to grow the university and create an environment that is conducive to learning. We are mindful that the first impression many prospective students have of the university is its buildings and grounds. This year we filled three (3) vacancies in the maintenance department with plans

to add additional personnel in fiscal year 2009. The funding for these new positions will become available as the university continues to assess its current vacant positions and align its human resources with the university's Strategic Plan.

4. *The President should comment on what steps the university is taking to sustain enrollment growth and prepare for the additional students in the coming year.*

BSU Comments

We are involving a much broader array of faculty, staff, and students in our efforts to “close-the-deal.” A major emphasis will be placed on improving retention and our institutional culture will be critically important.

Enrollment is greatly impacted by students' ability to pay. In the fall of 2006, approximately 1,000 students had outstanding balances after classes began; that number was ultimately reduced to about 600 with balances after the second week of class. In spring 2007, a focused attempt was made to increase the participation in early registration such that the students would be aware of their financial obligations early and be able to explore options for meeting those obligations. In spite of these efforts, we still had to drop about 400 students who were unable to pay.

To sustain the growth, we have established an Enrollment Management Leadership Team that closely monitors enrollment. We are also enhancing our fundraising efforts such that we can provide more scholarships to assist with unmet need.

To prepare for additional students in the coming years, we are developing more on-line courses and we hope to be able to add additional faculty and upgrade facilities to accommodate additional students, especially in nursing and the STEM disciplines where hands-on laboratory experiences are vital.

5. *The President should comment on measures the university is taking to increase the percent yield.*

BSU Comments

The University has partnered with a company that has a track record of increasing yield through the use of technology for a “high touch” approach. Additionally, since potential students tend to select institutions that offer the

best financial package, the University is making a major effort to increase scholarship dollars that can be offered to students.

6. *The President should comment on the steps the university will take in the near future performance of students with the Access and Success Program. The President should also comment on the accountability indicators developed by the HBI Presidents.*

BSU Comments

The Academic Advisement Center staff has been assigned to monitor freshmen students as it relates to the number of hours taken and academic performance. In FY 09, sophomore students will be added to their portfolio. Performance of financial aid recipients will be tracked and interventions provided as needed. Since the literature shows a correlation between the number of hours that a student works off-campus and student engagement and success, diligent efforts will be made to increase scholarship dollars to assist students with unmet need. Data will be gathered on the use of tutoring services, and student performance will be tracked for users of the service. Students will be placed in Math and English sections based on the diagnostics from the placement tests, that is, students will be channeled into sections based on their results. We are also developing an Expected Student Performance profile based on entrance credentials (high school core courses, high school attendance, performance test scores, high school disciplinary record, GPA, SAT/ACT, AP courses, placement tests scores) and will compile a database for student intervention prior to matriculation based on student entrance.

RESPONSE TO LEGISLATIVE ANALYST RECOMMENDATION

DLS Recommendation.

DLS recommends adding language restricting the expenditure of \$1,500,000 until BSU submits a report on how the funds will be spent to improve retention and graduation rates.

BSU Response:

Bowie State University accepts the recommendation providing for a report describing how we intend to use Access and Success funds. We look forward to working in partnership with MHEC, the Higher Education

Funding Commission, and the other HBIs to determine the most appropriate measures for assessing the effectiveness of our efforts to improve graduation and retention.