

## Senate bill would help fund diversity programs at law schools

By: Louis Krauss February 12, 2020

The deans of Maryland's two law schools and former law students addressed a Senate panel Wednesday in support of a bill that would funnel state funds into programs at both schools to support incoming students from the state's historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs.

Senate Bill 435, sponsored by Sens. Charles E. Sydnor III, D-Baltimore County and city, and Cory McCray, D-Baltimore city, had a first hearing Wednesday afternoon by the Senate's Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.



University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law Dean Donald Tobin. (The Daily Record / File photo)

Vernon Brownlee, 28, who attended Bowie State University as an undergraduate, said he would not have been able to attend the University of Baltimore School of Law — or obtain his current job with a law firm — without the support and connections he received from the school's Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence.

"While at Bowie, I had a dream that one day I would become a lawyer, but (I) faced challenges because I didn't know any lawyers or have any money to go to law school," said Brownlee, an associate at Franklin & Prokopik P.C. in Baltimore. "If this bill were to pass, you would help others continue to succeed and achieve their dreams."

Brownlee attended the hearing with Adam Shareef, who also took part in the Fannie Angelos Program and is now an associate at Franklin & Prokopik.

Donald Tobin, dean of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, said the bill would help the state's legal profession more accurately reflect Maryland's demographics.

"The problem is what's happened historically is there's not been a significant influx of diverse students in legal practice," said Tobin, who spoke along with University of Baltimore School of Law Dean Ronald Weich.

The bill would require Gov. Larry Hogan to set aside \$800,000 in fiscal year 2022, a sum that would be split between the University of Maryland law school and the University of Baltimore School of Law. The amount from the state would rise to \$2 million in fiscal 2024.

The funding would be directed to the University of Baltimore's Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence and the University of Maryland's Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative.

The Fannie Angelos program financially supports incoming law students from the HBCUs, prepares them for the LSAT and helps them with the transition into law school.

The program annually admits eight Angelos Scholars, who receive a full scholarship if they score a 152 or above on the LSAT and maintain a 3.5 cumulative undergraduate grade point average. Members of the Fannie Angelos program also receive mentoring and make connections in the local legal community.

The University of Maryland's Diversity and Inclusion Scholars Initiative, which began in 2017, recruits students of all backgrounds. Tobin emphasized that the bill would focus solely on supporting students from the state's HBCUs.

University of Baltimore law professor Michael Meyerson, co-director of the Fannie Angelos program, said the bill would help "level the playing field" for students coming from historically black colleges.



Meyerson said the funding would help students pay for housing.

"I can't tell you how many students have dropped out because they get evicted and don't have anywhere to live," he said before the hearing.

The inspiration for the bill came from the Fannie Angelos program, Sydnor said, adding that the funding would help reinforce the pipeline between the HBCUs and the law schools.

---

[Tweet](#)

[Email](#)

[Share 1](#)

[Share](#)

[Print](#)

---

Tagged with:

DONALD TOBIN

FANNIE ANGELOS PROGRAM FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

LAW SCHOOLS