

Good morning, Bobcats!

The 2025 Maryland legislative session concluded earlier this month, and while we will have to withstand funding cuts to our state appropriation, Frostburg was the beneficiary of legislation that will help the University continue to be a leader in economic development and innovation in our region.

In 2021, Frostburg State University sought and received the legislature's approval to participate, along with Bowie State University, in TEDCO's Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) pilot program. In the two years of the pilot, participation in the MII Program allowed FSU to create and fund two very successful Bobcat Innovation Launch Pad events, partner with Deloitte to conduct a detailed feasibility study to establish a Regional Cybersecurity Operations Center (R-SOC), and this year, to begin to establish an entrepreneur hub and technology transfer program. This program has afforded the University an opportunity to create meaningful economic impact in the region.

The 2-year pilot ended this year, and in conversations initiated by Delegate Joe Vogel, FSU sought an extension of the program to continue to build upon its impact in Western Maryland. As a result of FSU's successful participation in the pilot, Delegate Vogel worked closely with Delegate Jason Buckel and with leaders at FSU to write legislation extending the program for an additional two years. The legislation received near-unanimous approval in the House and unanimous approval in the Senate, resulting in MII's Institution Partnership Extension Program. The program, which is now open to any public or private nonprofit institution of higher education deemed eligible by the initiative, may receive a total of \$250,000 in FY27 and FY28 to expand technology opportunities, entrepreneurial development and industry engagement. FSU wants to extend special thanks to Delegates Vogel and Buckel for ensuring FSU's involvement in this extension program.

Additionally, FSU extends thanks to Senator Craig Zucker, a member of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the Chair of its Capital Budget Subcommittee, for thinking of Frostburg when allocating capital funds for special projects. Chair Zucker led the effort to provide \$1,000,000 to be used to install new turf on FSU's baseball field. A special thanks is also extended to Senator Mike McKay for supporting this project. Frostburg State University and the neighboring communities will benefit tremendously from this necessary upgrade.

I also wanted to let the campus community know that I have signed a statement, recently released by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), from more than 400 college and university presidents and leaders of scholarly societies in response to ongoing actions by the federal government affecting higher education. The statement, titled "A Call for Constructive Engagement," calls for constructive engagement that improves our institutions and serves our republic.

The full statement and an up-to-date list of signatories are available online at www.aacu.org/constructive-engagement.

With FSU pride,

Darlene Brannigan Smith