

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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October 13, 2023

Darryll J. Pines, Ph.D.  
President  
University of Maryland  
1101 Main Administration Building  
7901 Regents Drive  
College Park, MD 20740

Dear Dr. Pines:

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic (Select Subcommittee) is investigating the University of Maryland’s recent directive mandating that students leave campus if they test positive for COVID-19 (the “Directive”).<sup>1</sup>

As you know, pandemic-era school closures and hybrid learning programs had a significant negative effect on students, with many struggling academically and becoming susceptible to mental health issues.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the pandemic, it became increasingly clear that the nature of the threat had changed. Unlike older populations and those medically compromised, children and young adults were less likely to suffer severe illness as a result of COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the consequences of these misguided policies will likely be lifelong—especially among minority and low-income students who were more likely to attend schools that were closed longer.<sup>4</sup> According to an economist at the Hoover Institution, the economic impact of learning loss could result in pandemic-era children earning two to nine percent lower incomes during their lifetimes depending on the state in which they attended school.<sup>5</sup> This lower lifetime income translates to a loss of present value gross domestic product between \$1.3 trillion to \$500 billion in states with larger economies.<sup>6</sup> To Harvard Professor Thomas Kane, these policies “will

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<sup>1</sup> University of Maryland, *COVID Reporting, HEAL Line, Isolation, and Exposure Information* (Updated Sept. 2023), available at <https://health.umd.edu/HEAL>.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Goldstein, *What the New, Low Test Scores for 13-Year-Olds Say About U.S. Education Now*, THE N.Y. TIMES (June 21, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> See Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *Provisional COVID-19 Deaths by Sex and Age*, (last updated Sep. 6, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Leonhardt, David, *Not Good for Learning*, N.Y. TIMES (May 5, 2022) (relying on work by Professor Tom Kane at Harvard University).

<sup>5</sup> Eric Hanushek, *The Economic Cost of the Pandemic*, Hoover Institution, (2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

*be the longest-lasting and most inequitable legacy of the pandemic.”<sup>7</sup>*

These failures have meant that schools—including institutions of higher education like yours—must work to mitigate these severe learning deficits. The University of Maryland (Maryland) seemingly recognized this fact and requested more than \$115 million from the federal government under *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSA)*, the *American Rescue Plan* which it then received.<sup>8</sup> Among other things, these funds were directed to “prevent, prepare for, and respond to [the] coronavirus,” to “defray expenses associated with [the] coronavirus,” and “provide financial aid grants to students [], which may be used for emergency costs that arise due to the coronavirus, such as tuition, food, *housing*, [and] health care....”<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, Maryland seems to be reinstating the same negative policies it implemented during the beginning of the pandemic at the expense of its students. We know more now, according to public reports, Maryland is removing students who test positive for COVID-19 from their dorms without providing temporary housing accommodations and sending them to their “permanent” homes—likely with their older, more at-risk, parents.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, students—as mandated by the Directive—are required to isolate at a nearby hotel.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, it’s the students’ parents—not your university—that are footing the bill, which begs the question of how Maryland spent the federal Coronavirus dollars it received.

This likely counterproductive directive will clearly burden and harm students’ education and mental health. This is highly concerning and requires further investigation. To further the Select Subcommittee’s investigation, please provide a staff-level briefing capable of answering questions related to the Directive including but not limited to:

1. How did the University of Maryland spend its federal COVID-19 aid?
2. How does the University of Maryland plan to administer and enforce the Directive?
3. How will the University of Maryland determine if a student goes to their permanent home or to a nearby hotel for quarantine?

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<sup>7</sup> Emily Baumgaertner, *Students Lost One-Third of a School Year to Pandemic, Study Finds*, N.Y. TIMES, (Jan. 30, 2023) (emphasis added) (relying on Bastian Betthäuser, *et al.*, *A systematic review and meta-analysis of the evidence on learning during the COVID-19 pandemic*, NAT. HUM. BEHAV., (Jan. 30, 2023)).

<sup>8</sup> Eric Neugeboren, *UMD to receive \$21 million in federal aid for coronavirus losses*, THE DIAMONDBACK (Apr. 9, 2020); Eric Neugeboren, *UMD projected to receive about \$58 million from recent COVID-19 relief bill*, THE DIAMONDBACK (Mar. 25, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, Sec. 314 (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Nick Anderson and Susan Svrluga, *Covid worries linger on college campuses as fall semester begins*, THE WASH. POST (Sept. 8, 2023).

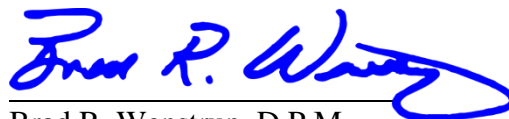
<sup>11</sup> *Supra*, n. 1.

4. How will the University of Maryland's Directive affect student performance, progression, and academic achievement?
5. What policies and procedures are in place to assist students with their academics while they are in quarantine?
6. How will the University of Maryland's Directive affect students' mental health?
7. What policies and procedures are in place to assist students with their mental health while they are in quarantine?
8. Does the University of Maryland have an accommodation plan for those who are medically vulnerable?
9. How does the University of Maryland plan to enforce the Directive if a student doesn't have a permanent home and cannot afford alternative lodging at a nearby hotel?
10. Does the University of Maryland intend to financially support students that require lodging at a nearby hotel?
11. Is the University of Maryland requiring its student-athletes to abide by these same procedures?
12. Are student-athletes still permitted to attend practice or participate in games if they are in quarantine or if they have received a positive test?

The Select Subcommittee is authorized to investigate "the efficacy, effectiveness, and transparency of the use of taxpayer funds and relief programs to address the coronavirus pandemic, including reports of waste, fraud, or abuse" under H. Res. 5. To schedule the briefing or ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5074.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Brad R. Wenstrup, D.P.M.  
Chairman



Nicole Malliotakis  
Member of Congress



Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.  
Member of Congress



John Joyce, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Michael Cloud  
Member of Congress



Debbie Lesko  
Member of Congress



Marjorie Taylor Greene  
Member of Congress



Rich McCormick, M.D., M.B.A  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Raul Ruiz, M.D., Ranking Member  
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic