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Students voice support for O'Malley's budget plan

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University System of Maryland schools are joining together and attempting to rally student support for Governor Martin O'Malley's proposed tax increase that would fund higher education.

Sarah Elfreth, Student Government Association senator and University System of Maryland student council representative and director of governmental operations, said students should write letters and send e-mails to their districts' representatives through Capwiz.com/usmd.

At the bottom of the page students can input their zip code to find their state senator or delegate.

"Right now the basic format of the letters is, we as students are in support of Governor O'Malley's proposed budget. Not necessarily for the corporate tax increase, but for the dedicated stream of funding for higher education," Elfreth said. "We need to speak up for ourselves and be heard, and the only way to do that is through numbers."

She said using the Web site is an easy to use tool targeted specifically at students.

She said it's different from the traditional letter writing campaign.

"It's a lot easier to do this than have a presence in Annapolis," Elfreth said explaining the difficulty of skipping class to go down to the capital.

She said if the higher education funding does not go through there will be tuition increases and stalls on the capital budget.

Elfreth said her goal is to have students send at least 250 letters. So far about 50 have letters have been sent.

"That's a low aim. We're pretty sure we can surpass that," she said.

Elfreth is trying to keep a rough estimate of how many letters are sent so Towson can compare notes with other USM institutions.

She said a large number of letters are needed in order to get politicians to take notice.

"A couple hundred here or there won't make a difference, but thousands and thousands will make a difference," she said.

Out-of-state students can also participate in the campaign.

Elfreth is from New Jersey but she's registered to vote in Maryland.

"[We're encouraging] people from Maryland to use their home address instead of having them all go to Towson representatives," she said.

To get the word out about Capwiz, Elfreth has been contacting student organizations and plans to have a link posted to the Towson Web site some time this week.

Elfreth said the campaign has brought students across the USM together.

"It's really inspiring considering we're so cutthroat and competitive. It's nice to work as a System," she said.

Last Wednesday students went to Annapolis to rally with other USM schools in favor of O'Malley's proposal. Elfreth said another lobbying trip to the capital is scheduled for next week.

Any students interested in attending the SGA's upcoming lobbying event can contact Elfreth at Selfre1@towson.edu or stop by the Student Government Association office in the University Union in Room 226.