

Catholic colleges hit hard by additional state cuts to Sellinger Program

Dr. Thomas H. Powell, president of Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, dreaded a Thanksgiving week review of his institution's fiscal year 2010 operating budget.

Mount St. Mary's and Powell were not alone, as Loyola University Maryland, the College of Notre Dame of Maryland and 14 other private colleges in the state face hard decisions after the Maryland Board of Public Works cut \$7 million Nov. 18 from the Joseph A. Sellinger Program of State Aid to Non-Public Institutions.

"We'll be meeting Monday (Nov. 23) morning, to figure out where this is coming out of our budget," Powell said, of approximately \$289,000 in lost funding that Mount St. Mary's had already allocated, primarily for financial aid.

Named for the late Jesuit president of Loyola, the Sellinger Program is administered by the Maryland Independent College and University Association. Tina Bjarekull, MICUA president, said that more than 80 percent of Sellinger funds are awarded as financial aid to Maryland residents, most of that distributed based on need.

According to MICUA, in fall 2008, the Maryland General Assembly appropriated \$52.2 million in the FY 2010 budget for the Sellinger Program. That appropriation is now at \$38.4 million, following cuts of more than \$1.7 million in July 2009, \$5 million in August and \$7 million Nov. 18.

In three rounds of state budget cutting, Mount St. Mary's lost more than \$568,000, Loyola lost more than \$1.6 million and the College of Notre Dame of Maryland lost nearly \$450,000.

"The financial aid is out the door, we've made commitments and we're not going to take money back from students," said Bjarekull. "What do you cut? One president told me, 'we are out of options.' That institution is looking at layoffs, food service,

maintenance.”

Theresa G. Wiseman, a spokeswoman for the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, said the cuts will “reduce the college’s ability to expand opportunities for training pharmacists, teachers and nurses, all of which are desperately needed throughout the state.

“The impact,” Wiseman added, “will be most severe at off-site locations for nursing and teaching – sites which, in many cases, provide continuing education and degree programs in areas which are historically underserved.”

The cuts come during a global economic crisis which has affected college endowments and students’ ability to pay.

“Loyola experienced a 90 percent increase in financial aid appeals this year,” said Courtney Jolley, a Loyola spokeswoman. “We are doing all we can to close the gap, but continued reductions from the state will limit student access to Loyola and other private colleges and universities.”

The Sellinger Program distributes funds based on the equivalent of full-time students, from 66 at Baltimore Hebrew University to more than 17,000 at Johns Hopkins University.

According to Bjarekull, the state had planned to cut \$11 million from the Sellinger Fund in its most recent round of budget cuts. Only an intense lobbying effort limited that figure to \$7 million.

The Board of Public Works, which consists of Gov. Martin J. O’Malley, Treasurer Nancy K. Kopp and Comptroller Peter Franchot, cut \$362 million all told from the state budget Nov. 18.

“The state has a serious budget deficit, we appreciate that,” Bjarekull said. “Our biggest concern is that there has been a disproportionate cut the last five months. Since fiscal year 2007, aid to public colleges has increased 13.2 percent and the Sellinger Program is down 23 percent.”

James E. Lyons, Maryland Secretary of Higher Education, defended the actions of

the Board of Public Works.

“I know that the governor feels that programs like Sellinger are important,” Lyons said, “but when you look at a projected deficit of \$1 billion, we have to look at the program. ... The state is in the business of funding public education.”

“We recognize that cuts need to be made,” said Powell, the Mount St. Mary’s president, “but I believe this is inequitable.”