

May 24, 2019

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.
President of the Maryland Senate
H-107 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates
H-101 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Miller and Speaker Jones:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have vetoed *Senate Bill 537* and *House Bill 262 – Higher Education – Tuition Rates – Exemptions*.

Last year, our administration worked closely with legislative leaders to create the Community College Promise Scholarships Program, which helps students attend one of Maryland's public community colleges by providing tuition assistance for any qualifying student eligible for in-state tuition. To build on the success of that program, I proposed legislation to establish the Promise Plus Program, expanding available scholarships and giving all eligible Maryland students United States citizens, permanent resident immigrants, and undocumented "Dreamers" alike – the opportunity to receive free tuition for the remaining two years at a public four-year institution.

Inexplicably, the General Assembly refused to support this common sense expansion to help all Maryland students. Instead, you adopted legislation that only narrowly expanded existing law to the total exclusion of all Maryland students holding U.S. citizenship or permanent resident ("Green Card") immigration status. This is unfair and unacceptable.

Higher education is a top priority of our administration. We have invested a record \$7 billion in Maryland's colleges, universities, and community colleges. Our state is home to one of the most highly educated populations in America—we are third in the nation in the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher and second in the nation in the percentage of the population with a graduate or professional degree. In addition, our administration has shown a strong commitment to making higher education accessible to more Marylanders by making college more affordable and providing much-needed relief to those who are struggling under the crushing weight of student debt.

Our three-year investment and initiative to limit tuition growth at Maryland's universities, colleges, and community colleges by buying down tuition rates has saved Maryland students \$40 million. Still, the harsh reality remains that earning a degree often goes hand-in-hand with crippling college debt. Student loan debt is now second only to mortgage debt as the largest debt balance in America. Nearly 60% of Maryland college students graduate with an average of more than \$27,000 in student debt.

To address this growing crisis, this year, I introduced our administration's Student Debt Relief Act. This proposal would have made 100% of student loan interest deductible and doubled the tax deduction under Maryland 529 Plans from \$2,500 to \$5,000. Sadly, the General Assembly failed to pass – or even vote on – this important measure. Instead, you chose to pass *Senate Bill 537* and *House Bill 262*, which fail to provide financial relief for all Maryland students.

Moving forward, our goals must be more broadly focused to ensure all Marylanders have access to a world-class education, instead of giving favorable treatment to just one small group. I remain committed to working with you to offer real, bipartisan solutions for higher education.

Sincerely,

Lawrence J. Hogan Jr.
Governor