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Government Operations and Estates
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Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg

Before the House Appropriations Committee In Support Of

House Bill 186

Higher Education – Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award –

Eligibility – Alteration

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

“I believe that teaching is such a critical profession, that it makes all other professions possible that defines our state. That defines our country.” – Nancy Grasmick

Inspired by the extraordinary career of Nancy Grasmick, The Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award provides loan repayment assistance to teachers who have qualifying student loan debt and have taught in Maryland for the past two years. The Award relies on Title I statistics to determine which teachers and schools are eligible for the award. With fewer schools qualifying as Title I and no less need for highly qualified teachers, this body must expand the eligibility criteria for schools to offer this essential incentive.

Historically, schools across the state used applications for federally provided Free and Reduced Meals as a proxy for determining poverty levels. Qualifying for federal funds depends on the measure of poverty in schools. Determinations of which schools qualified for Title I funds were based around that relatively straight forward metric.

However, filling out these forms and claiming benefits often left applicants ashamed of making obvious their poverty. Baltimore City and other jurisdictions, in response to the perceived stigma of claiming benefits and an overwhelming percentage of students in need, took the initiative of providing meals for all its students automatically through the USDA Community Eligibility

Provision.¹ Baltimore City officials now use “direct certification,”² with eligibility determined by the percentage of student families applying for federal benefits.

The obvious benefits came at a cost. Many city schools were no longer eligible for Title I benefits. (See below for a list of affected schools.)

This new formula is not perfect, and school poverty rates still do not accurately reflect the communities they serve. This is most notable at schools with large immigrant populations. Students from immigrant families are not applying for federal benefits as a result of the Trump administration’s immigration rhetoric, perceived crackdown on illegal immigration, and threats to hold immigrants’ use of public assistance against them.

House Bill 186 would add teachers at schools previously qualifying as Title I Schools to the list of those eligible for the Nancy Grasmick Teacher Award. This simple measure ensures that those teachers who have courageously stepped into some of the most challenging assignments won’t lose eligibility for this program because of a recalculation of the school’s poverty rate.

This bill is narrowly drafted to expand eligibility to schools that had Title I status during the 2018-19 school year and lost Title I status following the school year, based on the USDA Community Eligibility Provision calculation of poverty. It will ensure Maryland’s continued support for teachers in high poverty schools.

I respectfully request this committee to give HB 186 a favorable report.

List of Possibly Affected Schools

Local School System	School
Allegany	Bel Air Elementary
Allegany	Parkside Elementary
Anne Arundel	Point Pleasant Elementary
Baltimore City	Gilmor Elementary
Baltimore City	Roots and Branches School
Baltimore City	Wildwood Elementary/Middle School
Baltimore City	Monarch Academy Public Charter School
Baltimore City	Banneker Blake Academy of Arts and Sciences
Baltimore City	Northwood Appold Community Academy
Baltimore City	John Ruhrah Elementary/Middle
Baltimore City	Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle
Baltimore County	White Oak
Prince George's	Samuel P Massie Academy
Prince George's	Valley View Elementary
Prince George's	Cora L Rice Elementary
Talbot	Tilghman Elementary

¹ Richman, Talia, The Baltimore Sun “Free lunch program unintentionally cost some Baltimore schools thousands in federal funding” Mar. 7, 2018, available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-ci-poverty-undercount-20180202-story.html>

² Richman, Talia, The Baltimore Sun “Baltimore school with large immigrant population loses vital funding source” May 6, 2019, available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-ci-john-ruhrah-poverty-20190423-story.html>.