



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 307 – Higher Education - Maryland
Community College Promise Scholarship - Revisions

SPONSOR: Senator Pinsky, *et al.*

HEARING DATE: February 4, 2020

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 307**, which alters provisions of the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship ("Promise Scholarship") program by expanding eligibility to all high school graduates and GED recipients and adjusting the program's grade point average requirements. The bill also repeals the requirement that a scholarship awardee work for one year in the State per year of award or have their scholarship converted to a loan.

The road to college completion takes time, commitment, perseverance, family support, geographic access, and financial resources. Sometimes, that road begins at a community college. Maryland's community colleges are a good investment for the State because community colleges touch thousands of students and their families annually. Community colleges offer credit and non-credit programs that are designed to support students seeking an associate's degree, transferring to four-year colleges, or entering the workforce.

There are many reasons why students do not progress directly to a postsecondary institution, including unexpected family challenges, uncertainty of career interest, and lack of experience in the workforce. Eventually, those students realize their need for additional education and training for career advancement. Removing the requirement that recipients can only be two years out of high school would expand eligibility to all first-time college going students who meet the criteria. This alteration to the existing Promise Scholarship program has the potential to provide scholarship eligibility to slightly older Prince George's County residents, who come to the college seeking a degree or credential.

Additionally, this legislation will relieve Promise Scholarship awardees from the fear that their scholarships will be converted to loans if they are unable to find

employment in the State within one year after graduation. During the inaugural year of the Promise Scholarship program, Prince George's Community College students expressed reservation about accepting a scholarship that had the potential to convert to a loan. With the national student loan debt level continuing to rise, students want to be able to pursue higher education within their financial means. The data from the 2016 Economic Modeling Specialist International study indicated 88% of Maryland community college graduates stay and work in Maryland upon completing their courses of study. By removing this service obligation, students will be afforded the chance to use a scholarship that pays up to \$5,000 to pursue a college degree or credential without worrying about future financial obligations.

Furthermore, allowing the Promise Scholarship to be administered after federal and state financial aid is awarded and before local promise scholarships or institutional aid is awarded gives students time to make informed decisions about how to pay for their postsecondary education. Each year, students are prompted to begin the financial aid application process on October 1st. The earlier starting period, along with using tax information from the prior year, allows students to get information to colleges sooner and gives colleges the opportunity to provide award information to students earlier.

In sum, the proposed alterations to the Promise Scholarship program will streamline the awards process, eliminate barriers, and expand eligibility. Each amendment will help to increase access to postsecondary education and provide this valuable opportunity to more Prince George's County residents. With a college degree or credential, these individuals, who are our family members, our friends, and our neighbors expand the County's economic base through their higher incomes, while the businesses that employ them also become more productive through the students' added skills. These benefits together with the associated ripple effects, contribute millions in taxable income to the County's and the State's economy each year.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 307** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.