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SB 307, Higher Education – Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship – Revisions

Dr. James D. Fielder, Secretary

Support

TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES D. FIELDER, SECRETARY OF THE MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION, BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 4, 2020 REGARDING SENATE BILL 307, HIGHER EDUCATION – MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROMISE SCHOLARSHIP - REVISIONS

Good Afternoon Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairwoman Kagan and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of Senate Bill 307.

I am Dr. James D. Fielder, Secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

Senate Bill 307 makes changes to the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship including: 1) eliminating the two year out-of-high school requirement; 2) allowing high school applicants that meet the required GPA at the end of their senior year to be considered for the award; 3) allowing the determination of an applicant's unmet need to be determined after any State or Federal student financial aid has been awarded; 4) eliminating the service obligation requirement; and 5) removing the annual reporting requirement to report the number of scholarship awards for which the service obligation was deferred, waived, or converted into a student loan.

The first year of implementation of the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship was Academic Year 2019-2020. In the first implementation year we learned of a couple concerns that impacted recipients. These amendments will address those concerns.

1. The majority of students attending community colleges today are non-traditional students, more than two years out of high school.
2. In 2019 the statute was changed to allow for the student's first semester grade point

average (GPA) to be considered for awarding the scholarship. This was a positive move but it did not allow for awarding those students who improved their grades by graduation.

3. The vast majority of students received most of their tuition assistance from the State or Federal government. This required waiting for all others (businesses, fraternal organizations, etc.) to make their awards in order to determine the last dollar needed.

4. Local Promise Scholarships in various counties do not have a service obligation requirement. Anecdotally we learned that some students did not accept the State award in favor of the local award to avoid the service obligation in case they did not complete their degree.

During the summer and fall of 2019, representatives of MHEC and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges met to discuss what changes could be made to increase participation. Once we had some concrete changes to propose we met with the sponsor of this legislation who shared our desire to increase the number of awards. What you have before you is the result of those discussions and what we believe are solid solutions to identified challenges.

For these reasons, MHEC requests the committee return a favorable report on Senate Bill 307.