

**Written Testimony for the Record to the**  
**Maryland Senate**  
**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**

**and**

**Maryland House of Delegates**  
**Ways and Means Committee**

**Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Students in Foster Care or Homeless Youth**  
**(SB 564/HB 754)**

**February 18-19, 2020**

**FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Maryland PTA is the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For 105 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 564 and House Bill 754 ("SB 564/HB 754") that would require a county board of education to waive high school graduation requirements established by the county board in addition to the high school graduation requirements established by the State Board of Education ("BOE") for a student in foster care or who is a homeless youth if, while in 11th or 12th grade, the youth transfers into the local school system from a different system in the State or transfers between high schools in the local school system. The bill would prohibit a county board of education from waiving its graduation requirements if makes a finding that the student is reasonably able to complete the county high school graduation requirements in time to graduate from high school while the student remains eligible for foster care benefits.

As set out in the preamble to SB 564/HB 754, children in foster care and homeless youth are more susceptible to dropping out of high school due to their transient living conditions and the varying graduation requirements within the State. These children should be granted a Maryland diploma if they meet the graduation requirements established by the State BOE. This will permit foster and homeless children the opportunity to attend college with their peers or enter the workforce without extended primary schooling.

Children living in temporary homes suffer enough stress and trauma simply because of the lack of a permanent residence. Oftentimes, the transfer to a new school only adds to the stress and trauma, especially when a child learns credit from a prior school will not count toward graduation or additional time will be required to earn a high school diploma. Repeated moves can lead to continuous and repeated injury or trauma. For many of these students, success at school is one positive experience that allows them to have hope. Enforcing supplemental requirements on a homeless or foster child steals the hope of a better life and destroys the potential for some.

In addition to homeless and foster children, Maryland PTA recommends amending the bill to extend SB 564/HB 754 to children who transfer from a juvenile detention center into a local school system. We understand some might argue the circumstance of not meeting local school system graduation requirements are a natural consequence of juvenile delinquency. However, children remanded to a juvenile detention center become wards of the State much like foster children. Additionally, the State constitution does not exempt incarcerated children from the guarantee of a thorough and efficient public education.

As part of a youth's aftercare plan, the Department of Juvenile Services ("DJS") creates transition plans to help a youth returning to the community transition back to their local community school with as little disruption as possible. Requiring classes or credits in excess of the State BOE graduation requirements could disrupt the transition of a child from DJS custody back into the local community. In turn, this could decrease the likelihood of the child's success and increase the possibility of recidivism.

The *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 2015 article, "Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges," examined how incarceration impacts a youth's life chances. The article reported juvenile incarceration decreases the chances of high school graduation by 13 to 39 percentage points and increases the chances of incarceration as an adult by 23 to 41 percentage points, as compared to the average public school student in the same area. The article also noted that although incarceration of juveniles is intended to be short in duration, it can be very disruptive. Maryland PTA believes allowing county boards of education to waive local graduation requirements for juvenile offenders in the same way as foster or homeless children will facilitate rehabilitation, increase graduation rates, and restore hope for incarcerated juveniles.

For reasons stated, Maryland PTA supports SB 564/HB 754, and recommends a favorable report with the amendment noted.

Respectfully Submitted,



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President