



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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SUPPORT – **HB754** : High School Graduation Requirements for Students in Foster Care or Homeless Youth
House Ways and Means Committee, February 19, 2020
Testimony of Ingrid Lofgren, Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit legal services provider that provides free legal representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative serves unaccompanied homeless youth ages 24 and younger.

Youth experiencing homelessness are 87 percent more likely to drop out of school than their housed peers. Youth experiencing homelessness often have tenuous and highly mobile living situations, which of course negatively impacts educational stability. In a single school year, 41 percent of homeless children will attend two different schools and 28 percent will attend three or more schools. Research indicates that a student loses three to six months of educational progress on average with each move. Thus, homeless youth are at high risk of falling behind due to mobility alone, let alone the many other barriers they face related to poverty and unmet basic needs.

Youth who don't complete high school are 4.5 times the risk of experiencing homelessness compared to peers who completed high school. In addition, youth aging out of the foster care system experience high rates of homelessness. During the 2016-2017 school year, the national graduation rate for homeless students was 64 percent.¹ Homeless youth who don't receive a high school diploma are at an even greater risk of remaining homeless because their employment opportunities will be limited. Without a sufficient income, it is less likely homeless youth will be able to maintain housing or pull themselves out of poverty. More than 23,000 children will age out of the U.S. foster care system every year; 20 percent of these youth will instantly become homeless.²

HB754 will standardize graduation requirements throughout Maryland in order to reduce the educational barriers faced by youth experiencing foster care and homelessness. HB754 eliminates the additional barrier of having to complete extra credits to receive a high school diploma for youth who are transferring schools at no fault of their own. HPRP strongly supports this common sense solution that will have a positive fiscal impact by reducing rates of homelessness and poverty, and levels the playing field for youth experiencing homelessness and poverty without disadvantaging anyone else.

HPRP urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB754. For more information, please contact Ingrid Lofgren at ilofgren@hprplaw.org or (410)685-6589 ext. 11.

¹ SchoolHouse Connection, *Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness Reaches All-Time High; Growth in Numbers of Unaccompanied Youth Most Marked*, available at <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/number-of-students-experiencing-homelessness-reaches-all-time-high-growth-in-numbers-of-unaccompanied-youth-most-marked/>

² National Foster Youth Institute (2017)
<https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>