

**Date February 25, 2020**

**Good Afternoon,**

**My name is Emma Hughes, I am here to testify for support HB 1011 Outreach and College Access**

**Last year, I was awarded the opportunity to compete in the Miss Maryland USA competition and as I prepared, I came upon a list of plausible questions. Just for context, the judges ask the top 5 contestants their view on any question. Contestants are not judged on personal views, but the level of competency in regards to public speaking. Regardless, I wanted to familiarize myself with the types of questions that could appear and one that stuck with me was “what is the biggest problem you think your generation faces?” I spent a lot of time pondering the question and I came to the conclusion that globally individuals—especially children, have the inability to access. Access the necessities for nourishment and access to resources that will give them the opportunity to live life at an equal playing field. I was able to look back on my life and was thankful for the opportunity to grow up in Howard County. I grew up in a planned community that allowed individuals of all socioeconomic statuses to access the same education. And while I am thankful for that opportunity, I was still at a disadvantage. I am a first generation American whose parents never went to college. I knew the basics about applying, but was ignorant to the numerous steps after writing the personal statement. Unfortunately, High Schools are not always concerned about long term success in terms of retention as much as they are focused on initial scholarship amount. Not everyone knows to check if their funds can be renewed or if it is a one time award; and most of my peers had their parents’ experiences to guide them. But, I was fortunate to have crossed paths with Mr. Fisher and First Generation College Bound. Not only did they sit down and discuss my individual college interests, but First Generation College Bound *hosted workshops that assisted with topics such as funding higher education*. We even had someone walk us through the FAFSA process and interpret our information. And FGCB did not stop there, they continued to provide advice, encouragement and support to attend and graduate college. I**

can recall care packages every semester, encouraging me to keep going and a reminder that someone was cheering me on as I am a proud graduate of Mt. St. Mary's College

That above all else matters, to know a program like First Generation College Bound cares even as I am finishing my dual masters program. I can honestly say that without the guidance I was given, seven years ago, I would not be able to navigate now. There needs to be more programs like FGCB that can help mend the gap. It is more than just getting to college or getting a degree, programs like First Generation College Bound provide individual access to live a fruitful life.

Thanks,