

Testimony in Support of SB 155

Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee • January 27, 2021

Members of the Prince George's County Youth Action Board
Prince George's County, Maryland

Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to give our testimony in support of Senate Bill 155, which will improve Maryland's tuition waiver for youth experiencing homelessness.

The Prince George's County Youth Action Board believes that SB 155 is important because it will remove unnecessary obstacles for homeless youth interested in attending college for better opportunities and to achieve their educational goals. Most importantly, allowing access to stable housing while attending the institution will provide them with the support needed to pursue higher education.

This bill will allow homeless youth the option to attend school, prevent youth from searching for alternative ways to survive, and break the stigma of how homeless youth are viewed currently (as one who is lazy, does not want to work or education, etc.). Youth who are currently enrolled or considering enrollment can also receive work study with this Waiver. Overall, the Tuition Waiver Bill will bring an increased awareness to the topic of homeless youth and young adults in the state of Maryland and nationwide.

We also ask that you consider removing the annual recertification for the waiver. Annual recertification often puts youth in positions that make it difficult to reapply because of a potential loss of documents or changes in circumstances, possibly resulting in re-traumatizing them. Additionally, with the decrease in employment opportunities or loss of jobs due to COVID-19, schools are completely unaffordable to a person who is homeless and unemployed. Adjusting the bill will meet the needs of a youth that have been affected by COVID-19.

Education is the building block that can ensure the success of a youth. This can be the support for which a homeless youth needs to be successful. They will be able to focus on other areas of life such as mental health, employment, and recreational activities – please make sure students struggling with housing instability during and after the Covid-19 pandemic can access education. We strongly urge you to support SB 155.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Prince Georges County Youth Action Board
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