

DATE: January 27, 2021

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 155

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

BILL TITLE: Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Alterations and Reports

DHS POSITION: Support

The Department of Human Services (DHS) respectfully offers this letter of support regarding Senate Bill 155 (SB 155). This bill impacts prior, current, and future DHS youth who are eligible for the tuition waiver program. This bill ensures the services offered as part of the tuition waiver program are easily accessed, supports safe and stable housing for vulnerable young adults, and puts in place appeals procedures to review decisions made when a youth is denied on-campus housing.

SB 155 would require public institutions of higher education to provide priority consideration for on-campus housing to homeless and foster youth who are exempt from tuition payment. Additionally, institutions of higher education must: (1) make the application for tuition exemption available to all prospective and current students, (2) notify students of the application, and (3) establish a process for foster care recipients and homeless youth to appeal a denial of a tuition exemption application. Lastly, the bill requires each public institution of higher education to report certain data annually on foster care recipients and homeless youth, including those who were denied the tuition waiver, the reason for the denial, as well as the outcomes of any appeals.

Education is a foundation and pathway used to promote independence and self-sufficiency for youth. Maryland foster youth who have goals of attending college or a university are able to do so with the financial assistance of the Foster Care Tuition Waiver and the Education and Training Voucher. The tuition waiver is a major benefit that can make a difference in the decision-making for a youth who is a current or former recipient of foster care services.

Housing stability is a crucial first step towards success in young adulthood, especially for those youth exiting foster care. The National Youth in Transition (NYTD) database provides information on youth over three points of time (at ages 17, 19, and 21). It supplies insight on the challenges of housing stability for youth exiting foster care and transitioning to the adult world. For youth that remain in care until ages 19 or 21, the NYTD data shows that youth experience homelessness at a rate of 4.5% and 6.5% respectively. This may seem small, but is by no means insignificant. NYTD data also shows that outcomes for youth who leave care before ages 19 or 21 are worse than their counterparts who remain in care longer. Nationally, approximately 32% percent of those who left care before reaching age 19 experienced homelessness, and 44% of those who left care before age 21 experienced homelessness.

Given the number of youth who utilize the tuition waiver, and the number of youth who we know experience homelessness, SB 155 may alleviate housing burdens for vulnerable youth while they are attending college.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer support for SB 155. We ask the committee to give SB 155 a favorable report.

