



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

**Testimony to the Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee
SB 155 : Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Alterations
and Reports
Position: Favorable**

January 27, 2021

The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chair
Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic justice and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today to testify in support of SB 155.

In 2017, the General Assembly established the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Tuition (UHY) waiver because of its commitment to helping foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth earn a college degree, increase their future job opportunities, and improve their life outcomes.

Since the implementation of the UHY waiver, advocates and UHY waiver recipients have discovered that there are significant barriers to receiving the tuition waiver and it has been underutilized. SB 155 aims to improve the use of the UHY waiver and remove barriers for students needing to access the waiver.

For example, the annual recertification requirement requires students to recertify their homeless status each year in order to qualify for the tuition waiver. This requirement unfairly punishes students if they choose to work while attending school and are able to afford housing as a result. Youth who enter college unaccompanied and homeless face significant financial barriers to college completion even if they are able to secure housing at some later point. Therefore, these students should have access to the tuition waiver throughout the time needed to earn a degree, regardless of their housing status.



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Right now, we are seeing the impact that COVID-19 is having on student college enrollment and students' decisions to pursue higher education. Fall undergraduate enrollment declined by 3.6% from the fall of 2019.¹ For students who've experienced homelessness or have foster care involvement, the ability to afford college tuition greatly impacts their decision to attend or remain in college. COVID-19 is straining student budgets, and SB 155 will help stop students from choosing between their education or food, housing, and other basic necessities.

Students experiencing homelessness overcome so many barriers in order to get college ready. Tuition should not be another barrier for these students.

The General Assembly must renew its commitment and dedication to helping foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth gain a college education.

For all these reasons, I urge you to move favorably on SB 155.

Best,

Marceline White
Executive Director

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<https://www.npr.org/2020/12/17/925831720/losing-a-generation-fall-college-enrollment-plummets-for-first-year-students>