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Legislative District 43  
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Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

*Chair*  
Joint Committee on Ending  
Homelessness

*Chair*  
Joint Committee on Children,  
Youth, and Families



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**SUPPORT – SB 155**  
**Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth – Alterations and Reports**

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

January 27, 2021

Testimony of Senator Mary Washington

Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully urge you to vote favorable with amendments on Senate Bill 155, which makes several necessary changes to Maryland's existing tuition waiver for unaccompanied homeless youth (codified at Md. Code § 15-106.1) to address implementation challenges and bring Maryland's tuition waiver law in line with other states.

Maryland led the nation in 2014 when we passed unanimous bipartisan legislation creating a tuition exemption for unaccompanied homeless youth attending public colleges, universities, and vocational training programs. I am proud to have sponsored that legislation with fellow Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee member Senator Ed Reilly. We recognized the promise of higher education to provide a pathway out of poverty for talented students who overcome the immense challenges of homelessness to achieve college readiness. We also understood the significant return on investment that results from each additional year of subsidized education in terms of increased employment and earnings, improved health, reduced reliance on government benefits, and reduced rates of incarceration. Finally, we saw the opportunity to advance racial equity given that inequitable college access has locked in historic privileges and oppression, and that youth experiencing homelessness in Maryland are disproportionately Black and youth of color. We knew that as these future thought-leaders find the open doors that college can bring, we will all benefit from their insights and leadership.

The need for and benefits of the homeless youth tuition waiver are as clear in 2021 as they were seven years ago, and perhaps even more urgent. I remain committed to ensuring that our waiver law achieves the legislature's intent and its promise to Maryland's stellar students. Since 2014, we have learned from unforeseen challenges with implementation of Maryland's tuition waiver law as well as from other states that have passed similar laws in the intervening years. Attached to my testimony is a chart

that sets forth in detail problematic provisions in the existing tuition waiver law, SB 155’s proposed changes to these provisions, and the rationale for these changes. In terms of highlights, I emphasize that Maryland is the only state with a homeless youth tuition waiver that excludes youth who are experiencing homelessness with a parent or guardian and the only state that requires annual verification of homelessness. These limitations have profoundly negative consequences, as detailed in the attached chart, and must be remedied to ensure the effectiveness of our waiver and bring Maryland in line with best practices. Also included in the attachment is a chart that similarly provides a detailed explanation of amendments that I am presenting for the Committee’s consideration. These amendments are not in response to opposition or concerns about the bill, but instead reflect additional improvements that I developed after pre-filing.

Data from the Maryland Higher Education Commission’s “Maryland Student Financial Aid” annual reports on the number of youth accessing the tuition waiver and the amount of aid awarded are provided in the chart below.

<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>Community Colleges</b>	<b>Univ. System of Maryland</b>	<b>Morgan State Univ.</b>	<b>State Total</b>
Number	17	11	4	32
Cost	\$38,595 (\$2,270/student)	\$79,310 (\$7,210/student)	\$37,786 (\$9,446)	\$155,691
<b>2015-2016</b>				
Number	65	18	11	94
Cost	\$137,820 (\$2,120/student)	\$159,132 (\$8,840/student)	\$85,825 (\$7,802/student)	\$382,777
<b>2016-2017</b>				
Number	64	42	8	114
Cost	\$131,631 (\$2,056 /student)	\$361,157 (\$8,598 /student)	\$71,919 (\$8,989 /student)	\$564,707
<b>2017-2018</b>				
Number	112	67	16	195
Cost	\$326,420 (\$2,914 /student)	\$597,090 (\$8,911 /student)	\$120,407 (\$7,525 /student)	\$1,043,917

This chart reflects that the cost of the tuition waiver per student, per higher education institution segment, and statewide, is relatively low in that it covers only tuition, not room and board or other expenses. Providing free tuition enables homeless students to enroll in college and access other aid, such as the federal Pell Grant, which they can use towards these additional costs. Though SB 155 amends the tuition waiver law to include

accompanied homeless youth, the cost to institutions can be expected to remain low. According to the Maryland State Department of Education Report Card for Academic Year 2018-2019, the most recent reporting year, a total of 720 Maryland high school graduates experienced homelessness. See <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Graduation/GradRate/1/6/3/8/99/XXXX/2019>. Due to the immense challenges they face, only a fraction of graduating high school students experiencing homelessness are college ready, elect to pursue higher education, and successfully enroll in a two-year or four-year institution. According to Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count national survey, young adults who experienced homelessness were less than one-third as likely to be enrolled in a four-year college as stably housed peers. See Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel, S., Curry, S., & Carreon, E. (2019). Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

For those relatively few talented and hardworking students who are able to overcome the challenges of homelessness to make it to college, we must ensure that tuition is not the final insurmountable barrier that prevents them from accessing higher education and a pathway out of poverty. I welcome your partnership in this important effort and urge you to vote favorable with amendments on SB 155.

In Partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington".

Senator Mary Washington  
Maryland 43<sup>rd</sup> District