



TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
The Honorable Mary Washington

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: January 27, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 155 – *Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth – Alterations and Reports*

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 155.

Senate Bill 155 broadens the current tuition exemption at public higher education institutions to include all homeless youth who have lived in Maryland for 1 year before application and meets the definition of homeless youth as defined in the *McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act*. Currently, the program only applies to unaccompanied homeless youth. The legislation also expands the benefits under the program to include all expenses required to apply/attend an institution as well as prioritizing access to housing. The bill establishes an appeal process for those youth who are denied tuition exemption. Finally, the bill requires expanded data collection and reporting requirements by public higher education institutions to provide greater program accountability and will enable the Higher Education Commission to better evaluate the program and its impact.

Youth who are in foster care or are homeless are faced with incredible challenges to succeed. Access to higher education provides a critical opportunity to support these youth as they struggle to become self-supporting and identify and pursue a path toward success and stability. The changes to the program reflected in Senate Bill 155 provides critical access to homeless youth who face all of the challenges of homelessness but are not able to meet the narrow definition of being an unaccompanied minor. Furthermore, providing opportunities for housing benefits not only homeless youth but also foster youth who should be afforded the opportunity to live on campus where the support network for success is likely to be stronger. Senate Bill 155 is a notable improvement to the existing program. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
Danna L. Kauffman
410-244-7000