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Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 2, 2022

Testimony in Favor of SB501
Maryland Higher Education Commission - Procedures - Alterations

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 501 to start the process of implementing much-needed reforms to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

As this Committee is aware, MHEC currently handles various aspects of Maryland's higher education policy and regulation and we are grateful for their dedication to Maryland students and institutions. However, over the course of the interim, I received two separate concerns related to MHEC: one related to the transparency of Commission meeting and the other related to the tight timeline in which MHEC notifies the recipient of financial aid through the Howard P. Rawlings Guaranteed Access Grant (GA) and Educational Assistance (EA) program. SB501 is the result of those ensuing conversations:

On the transparency of Commission meetings, this legislation will simply require that each open meeting of the Commission be made available to the public through live video streaming and require that they make publicly available online archived meetings of the Commission.

This is similar to what this Committee previously required of the Board of Regents in 2019 legislation, and will ensure that all Marylanders and higher education institutions have the ability to view and understand the decisions that are being made about higher education in the State.

On the GA and EA award notification, this legislation will require that these awards be made on or before April 15th each year – rather than the current award date of May 1st (at the earliest).

This date change is critically important because of the timelines that our college students currently face. The current date of May 1st also happens to be the same date as the universal enrollment deadline for higher education institutions across Maryland and the nation – meaning that students likely do not know the full support our State is going to provide when they are making their decision on where to go for a college education. This is one of the most consequential economic decisions of a young person's life.

When our students do not have this information it can lead to:

1. Students being driven away from public MD institutions as they seek private or out of State institutions that can provide more scholarship.
2. Students submitting enrollment contracts (usually hundreds of dollars) at one institution but then enrolling elsewhere once we have provided them their award
3. Students missing out on other opportunities, such as housing, due to late enrollment.

Moving the award notification date up will provide future college students more information to be able to make more financially conscious decisions about their future.

Lastly, this legislation has led to more feedback on the critical matter of financial assistance to our students – and I would like to highlight two key points from those conversations and budget hearings with MHEC. I appreciate the Committee thinking through these larger challenges - I will potentially be bringing to this Committee in the form of an amendment after further conversations.

1. The requirement that MHEC seek financial matching information from the Comptroller's office to expedite the processing of applications; and,
2. The creation, or planning for the creation, of an updated universal scholarship platform in which Maryland students can more easily apply for scholarships.

Once again I respectfully request a favorable report to Senate Bill 501 to implement much-needed reforms to MHEC.