



March 2, 2022

**THE MARYLAND SENATE
EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

SB501 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations

**Testimony of Amma Felix
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Bethesda, Maryland
Also writing on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for College Access and Affordability**

Good afternoon, Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair and Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony about Senate Bill 501 regarding the alterations to procedures of the Maryland Higher Education Commission introduced by Senators Sarah Elfreth, Paul Pinsky, Jim Rosapepe and Mary Washington.

My name is Amma Felix, president and CEO of Collegiate Directions, Inc. (CDI), a comprehensive nonprofit organization that focuses on college access and completion for low-income, first-generation-to-college high school students in Montgomery County. We are in support of Senate Bill 501 and want to share with you some key points for your further consideration regard timing of award notification.

Setting Aside Funds is Important

The bill proposes setting April 15 as the award notification date for award recipients. We are supportive of the new date, but it only works provided that MHEC Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) can process all the applicants in a timely manner. We need greater infrastructure and more efficient practices to make sure this happens. The new notification date further compresses an already tight timeframe which has its challenges and where there are too many opportunities for low-income students to get caught in the administrative bureaucracy.

To prevent more students from falling through the cracks, we ask that for every Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant student in the process who is eligible, meets the criteria and submits by the MHEC deadline but is not awarded there should be funds held in reserve so that the proposed change in award date does not penalize any new applicants or renewals.

There must also be other ways to make the verification process more efficient including partnering with other state agencies (ex., the Office of the Comptroller to verify income) to ensure that this proposed April 15 deadline can be met.

Thank you for your time.