

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Mayor, City of Baltimore

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THE 100% PROJECT

## *Academy for College & Career Exploration*

*Robert H. Poole Building  
1300 W. 36th Street, Baltimore, MD 21211*



### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBo473

#### Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out-of-State Tuition Exemption Eligibility

**Committee:** Education, Energy and the Environment

**Date:** February 23, 2024

**Position:** Support

Good afternoon,

My name is Elena Walsh and I am the college and career counselor at the Academy for College and Career Exploration in Baltimore, Maryland. I would like to share why I strongly support House Bill 473 and the increased access to out-of-state tuition exemption eligibility for undocumented students.

I work in Baltimore City Schools, where we have a large population of undocumented students; students that have come to this country in search of more opportunities and a better life. However, after working hard in American schools for years, often after learning a second language simultaneously to do so successfully, these students are met with few post-secondary opportunities.

At the moment, the only viable options for undocumented students are to work at low-paying jobs or to go to college, as trade programs, the governor's service year, and the military are not options for them. College is the obvious choice, however, many of these students are unable to pursue a college degree because of the current requirements placed on them by the Dream Act. Presently, students and or their parents need to have filed taxes for the three years preceding the student's high school graduation to be eligible for state financial aid and in-state tuition rates. Without three years of taxes, students are left with next to no options because any college or university will be cost prohibitive, and many private scholarships require that a FAFSA or MSFAA is filed to be eligible for their support. It is honestly incomprehensible to me that we dangle this amazing opportunity in front of hardworking students, and then make it difficult to access.

Take Luis, the valedictorian who witnessed the murders of both of his parents in his home country. Who went from knowing no English to earning 4s and 5s on AP exams in just three and a half years in this country. He has the most incredible mind of any student I have ever worked with, and he had dreams of becoming an environmental engineer. Instead of changing the world, he is working at a gas station as he waits for his asylum approval. He could not file three years of back taxes because he was not working for all three years, so there were no taxes to file. Take Esteban, whose mother could not afford to pay the accountant's fee for three years, only one, and he missed the MSFAA deadline. He works in a factory now, when he had

plans to earn a degree in computer science. Finally, take Selena, who moved here from California. Selena moved here ahead of her mother to live with her aunt so there would be no disruption to her high school career. Her mother followed two years later when she had finally earned the money to pay for Selena's younger siblings to come too. Although Selena lived in Maryland for four years, her mother was only here for two. Although her mother paid taxes for those two years, Selena missed the opportunity for all state aid and the opportunity to attend college. She has DACA and works for a catering company now when she would have been finishing up her nursing degree this May.

I understand the reasoning behind having families pay taxes to benefit from in-state tuition rates and state aid, however, for citizens to qualify for the exact same benefits, they are only required to demonstrate that "for at least 12 consecutive months immediately prior to course registration that they had the continuous intent to reside in Maryland indefinitely and for a primary purpose other than that of attending an educational institution in Maryland." Why are we holding undocumented students to a different and much more stringent standard? This is inequitable and we are limiting opportunities for these students and for Maryland's workforce. It is for these many reasons that I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB473.