



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 864 - HIGHER EDUCATION - TUITION EXEMPTION FOR FOSTER CARE RECIPIENTS - ELIGIBILITY - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 864 (SB 864).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventive and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to help Marylanders reach their full potential. Our Social Services Administration implements the Out-of-Home Care (OOH) program, which is affected by SB 864. Under current law, if a foster youth were to be in care at least one year, if they exit the care of the Department through guardianship, adoption, or reunification with their parent(s) after turning 13 years old, they retain eligibility for the tuition waiver, which applies to all Maryland public institutions of higher education. SB 864 proposes lowering the qualifying age to 8 years old, while keeping the other requirements in place. This would promote permanency by encouraging adoptions and guardianships for younger children in the care and custody of the Department.

As youth age in the foster care system, their likelihood of finding permanency decreases significantly. [Child Trends](#) analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) found that only 62% of older youth ages 14-21 in the United States exited foster care to legal permanency in 2023, whereas the comparable figure for children ages 13 and under was 98 percent. Ages 8 - 12 are critical developmental years in a child's life where self-identity begins to form. Achieving legal permanency during this window, supported by the promise of future educational funding, increases the likelihood of positive outcomes as an adult,

including mental health, academic achievement, economic stability, and career success.

For many prospective adoptive parents and kin guardians who often live on fixed or modest incomes, the decision to add a new permanent member to their family is a personal choice, but it is often constrained by the reality of the financial cost associated with raising a child. The support given to a family once they are the adoptive parents or legal guardians of a child is reduced from when they were foster parents, and higher education can be a significant unplanned financial burden for these parents and legal guardians.

SB 864 is a direct investment in the Moore-Miller Administration's goal of ending childhood poverty, as education is the most effective ladder for economic mobility. Lowering the eligible age from 13 to 8 years old provides a powerful economic stabilization tool for families. For parents working toward reunification, the tuition waiver has the potential to break the cycle of generational poverty. It ensures that even if a family has struggled with poverty or instability in the past, the state's early intervention protects their child's path to a degree.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at [justin.hayes1@maryland.gov](mailto:justin.hayes1@maryland.gov).

In service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gloria Brown Burnett  
Interim Secretary