



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**SB864 Higher Education –Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**By: Linda T. Kohn, President**

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD), a nonpartisan organization, supports policies that provide an equitable and quality education for all children and young people. Accordingly, the League supports SB864, which extends educational opportunity to foster care recipients.

SB864, cross-filed with HB982, makes an adjustment to Maryland’s existing Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients. The bill’s purpose is to expand eligibility for the tuition benefit at Maryland’s public higher education institutions to children who have been in foster care from a younger age. Under the current regulation, a young person who has been adopted or placed in guardianship qualifies for the tuition waiver only if they were in foster care on or after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. SB864 bill lowers the threshold to 8 years, expanding age eligibility. In doing so, the bill ensures that children who may have found home permanency earlier in their lives are not excluded from this tuition benefit.

SB862 continues to specify the eligibility requirements for the tuition waiver. The recipient must enroll at a Maryland postsecondary institution – for a vocational certificate, associate or bachelor’s degree – prior to the student’s 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. The applicant must file for federal and state financial aid, and scholarships or grants earned by a recipient may not be applied to tuition. Foster care recipients will remain eligible until 10 years after enrolling, or by the date when a bachelor’s degree is awarded.

Those who have been in foster care experience special challenges when seeking postsecondary education. These can include finding related financial and housing support as well as family and personal issues.<sup>1</sup> SB864 helps to ensure that these

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<sup>1</sup> National Foster Youth Institute, Social and Economic Mobility. <https://nfyi.org/social-economic-mobility/>  
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vulnerable young people are not excluded from support because they were adopted at an earlier age. The bill ensures Maryland's education policy works in tandem with the state's child welfare goals, which encourages home permanency.

For many adoptive and guardianship families, long-term educational costs are a major concern. Educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of lifetime earnings, workforce participation, and economic stability. For foster care recipients, the tuition waiver is an important benefit. Expanding the age of eligibility will increase educational opportunity for young people at an earlier age.

For these reasons, the LWVMD recommends a **FAVORABLE** report of SB864.