



March 11, 2026

Senate Bill 864 — Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility

Senate Education, Energy, & Environment Committee

Position: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 864.

MARFY represents licensed child placement agencies and community-based providers across Maryland that serve children and families through foster care, adoption, kinship support, residential services, and permanency programs. Our members work every day to help children achieve safe, stable, and permanent family environments. Senate Bill 864 supports these goals by strengthening access to higher education opportunities for youth who have experienced foster care while also promoting earlier permanency outcomes.

Maryland's Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients is a critical support that helps youth pursue postsecondary education and workforce training by covering tuition and mandatory fees at Maryland public institutions. [Currently, eligibility for youth who achieve permanency through adoption, guardianship, or reunification may depend on whether they were in out-of-home placement on or after their 13th birthday.](#) Senate Bill 864 appropriately lowers this threshold to ensure that children who achieve permanency earlier in childhood are not unintentionally excluded from educational support.

From a child welfare perspective, this change is significant. [Research](#) consistently demonstrates that permanency achieved earlier in childhood leads to better long-term outcomes, including improved emotional well-being, educational stability, and adult self-sufficiency. Policies that support permanency at younger ages help reduce the likelihood that youth will remain in foster care for extended periods or age out without permanent family connections.

Importantly, the likelihood of adoption and other permanent placements declines as children grow older. Younger children are significantly more likely to achieve permanency, while older youth often remain in care longer and face greater barriers to stable family placement. Providing consistent educational supports regardless of age at permanency removes a potential disincentive and reinforces Maryland's commitment to placing children into permanent homes as early as possible.



Educational support also plays a meaningful role in permanency decision-making. Families considering adoption or guardianship frequently evaluate long-term financial responsibilities, including education. Ensuring that children remain eligible for tuition assistance regardless of whether permanency occurs before or after age 13 helps families feel more confident in their ability to provide stable, lifelong support. Senate Bill 864 therefore functions not only as an education policy, but also as a permanency-support policy.

Youth who experience foster care face substantial barriers to higher education and economic stability. [National research](#) shows that only a small percentage of former foster youth complete postsecondary degrees compared to the general population, and many lack family financial resources to support educational attainment.

Tuition waiver programs are widely recognized as critical tools to improve outcomes for this population. In fact, [more than half of U.S. states offer tuition waivers or similar financial assistance programs](#) for students with foster care experience, demonstrating broad recognition of the importance of these supports.

Senate Bill 864 aligns education policy with the State's broader permanency goals. By lowering the eligibility age threshold, the bill removes unintended barriers, encourages earlier stable placements, and strengthens long-term outcomes for youth served by Maryland's child welfare system.

For these reasons, MARFY respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 864.

For more information call or email:

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