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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Maryland State Senate  
Annapolis, Maryland

**RE: SB 864—Higher Education—Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients**  
**Position: Favorable**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Maryland's tuition exemption for foster youth is one of the most important tools we have to support young people who have experienced instability. But today, an outdated provision in the law unintentionally excludes the very children our system is designed to protect. Under the current statute, a young person who was adopted, reunified, or placed in guardianship must have been in foster care on or after their 13th birthday to qualify for the tuition exemption. That threshold does not reflect how permanency actually works in Maryland, and it creates a barrier for children who achieve stability earlier in life.

Senate Bill 864 corrects this misalignment by lowering the qualifying age from 13 to 8. This is a narrow, targeted update, but it addresses a very real problem. Permanency overwhelmingly occurs before age 10. As the white paper notes, "permanency is most likely to occur before age 10," and adoption likelihood "declines sharply as children age." Families often consider long-term educational support when deciding whether to adopt or accept guardianship. When eligibility is tied to age 13, we risk sending the wrong message: achieving permanency too early may cost a child access to higher education support.

The evidence is clear that instability in early childhood, well before age 13, has lasting effects on learning, school engagement, and postsecondary enrollment. The Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center reports that only 58% of youth with foster care experience enroll in college after high school, and about half rely on state financial aid, including the tuition waiver. These barriers are already present long before adolescence. SB 864 simply ensures that children who spent at

least one year in out-of-home placement after age 8 are not penalized for achieving permanency sooner.

This bill does not create a new program, expand benefits, or impose new costs on local governments. Institutions already verify foster care history through existing Department of Human Services documentation, so implementation requires no new systems.

Most importantly, SB 864 supports what our child welfare system strives for: stable, permanent families as early as possible. Children in foster care are disproportionately children of color, youth from low-income families, and youth with trauma histories. Removing barriers tied to the age at which permanency occurs ensures that every child who has experienced instability has a fair chance at opportunity and a pathway to higher education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alonzo T. Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alonzo T. Washington  
Maryland State Senate