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Appropriations Committee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB534-Nonpublic Schools- Transcripts-Prohibition on Punitive Measures Related to Student Debt

Hearing: February 18, 2026, 1:00pm

Chair Jheanelle Wilkins, Vice Chair Jessica Feldmark

Ways & Means Committee

HB534 is about fairness, accountability, and protecting students from consequences that they did not create.

Since the beginning of my term, my office has heard from multiple families across Maryland whose children have been denied access to their official transcripts because of an outstanding tuition balance. In many of these cases, the debt is a result of financial hardship, job loss, medical emergencies, or other circumstances entirely outside of the student's control.

When a student's transcript is withheld, the consequences are often immediate and severe. Students are prevented from enrolling in a new school, applying for scholarships, or denied college admission. When a student's academic momentum stalls students lose entire semesters of progress. A transcript is a record of a student's academic history reflecting work already completed and credits earned.

HB534 does not forgive a debt, nor does it prevent schools from pursuing other lawful avenues to recover unpaid balances. It simply ensures that children are not being used as leverage in financial disputes between adults. Maryland has long recognized that educational access is a fundamental priority. We do not allow our colleges and universities to withhold transcripts for debt in this manner, and if we protect adult learners from this practice, we should not allow it to happen to K-12 students.

I would like to share two poignant examples that underscores the urgency of this legislation. Below, an email from the niece of one of our own legislators who was forced to repeat the 10th grade after her private school withheld her transcript, and the second, a mother pleading for assistance after her son's football scholarship was rescinded.

"Dear Delegate Smith,

In 2003, I found myself repeating the 10th grade as my former Catholic private high school withheld my academic transcripts. My student account had an outstanding balance, which, as a 16-year-old, I couldn't afford to settle myself due to financial hardships at home.

Facing this challenge, I transferred schools during the second week of classes after an unsuccessful battle for my transcripts and other official school documents. As a scholar, I encountered an arduous transition to the new school, impacting my GPA and jeopardizing my athletic eligibility.

It is disheartening that a child should endure denial of access to education due to a debt not incurred by the child, but imposed by the school.

The denial of my transcripts forced me to retake 10th-grade courses throughout the 11th and 12th grades. I attended summer school but lost the opportunity to advance my education by taking college courses as a senior.”

Good afternoon,

I am reaching out to anyone I think could provide insight on HB1164. This is a situation that is near to my heart because my youngest son Nathan Harris is currently in a situation where do to his father falling on hard times he fell behind in payments and now he can't pursue higher education. Nathan has since loss football opportunities at Virginia Union and Christopher Newport due to incomplete enrollment. I need to know has this bill passed? Any insight would be helpful and greatly appreciated!*

Sincerely,

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie M. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Delegate Stephanie Smith