



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

**Testimony to the Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee
HB 419 : Higher Education - Report on Collection Practices for Unpaid Fees and Services
Position: Favorable**

February 11, 2020

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dariya Brown and I am the Student Rights Program Manager at Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC). I am also a former student and Academic Advisor at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing today to testify in support of HB 419.

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic justice and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

Many colleges withhold students' academic documents as leverage in order to get students to pay unpaid library fines, parking tickets, tuition and fees, and other debt owed to the institution.

As an academic advisor, I saw firsthand how not being able to obtain academic documents impacted students and prevented them from accessing critical financial aid and scholarships and career opportunities. Withholding students' transcript creates additional obstacles and barriers to success and unfairly punishes financially struggling students.

MCRC works on college affordability, fines and fees, and debt collection issues. When a college uses a student's transcripts, academic reports, and/or diplomas as a debt collection tool, low-income students are hurt the most. Colleges' practice of transcript withholding needs to be part of our conversation on how we can further protect low-income Maryland students in pursuit of higher education.

HB 419 seeks to understand the scope of the problem surrounding postsecondary institutions' debt collection methods that may adversely impact our students. HB 419 requires colleges and universities to collect information on the number of transcripts withheld, the amount owed by the college student, and the source of indebtedness. Armed with good data on the scope of this issue, policymakers can then consider appropriate measures to remedy the situation.

For all these reasons, I urge you to move favorably on HB 419.

Best,
Dariya Brown, Student Rights Program Manager