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Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Government Operations and Estates
and Trusts Subcommittee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg
Before the House Appropriations Committee In Support Of
House Bill 1016

Higher Education – Maryland Corps Program Fund – Alterations

Madam Chair and members of the committee:

In a campaign speech introducing the Peace Corps on October 14, 1960, Senator John F. Kennedy told students at the University of Michigan, “On your willingness...not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think will depend the answer whether a free society can compete.”

Maryland is a national leader in assisting students seeking a career in public service. People who take public service jobs after graduation from college or graduate school are eligible for debt forgiveness under the Janet Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program. Students interning with the government or a non-profit are eligible for a stipend under the Walter Sondheim Internship Program.

In that spirit, the Maryland Corps Program and the Maryland Corps Fund were established in 2016. In fiscal year 2017, the operating budget included \$150,000 for the program, but Governor Hogan chose not to release any funds. House Bill 1016 would mandate that the Governor include \$150,000 for the fund each fiscal year beginning in fiscal 2022.

The purpose of the program is to provide at least 100 young people with meaningful public service opportunities that would include skills and experience to help them transition from high school to college. Corps participants would have to serve for at least nine months with a non-profit organization or government agency that has a focus on community, civic engagement, or volunteerism.

The benefits of gap years for students are well documented. According to Gap Year Association data, 90% of students who take time off after high school enroll in a four-year institution within one year of completing their gap-year break. "Studies have shown that taking a gap year is not only tied to increases in college GPAs, but more significantly is tied to improved job satisfaction," the Association notes. "In short, taking the time to figure out what success looks like is a surefire way to be directed in achieving it."

Although the benefits of gap years to businesses and communities are easily intuitive, they are not well documented. A February 2016 report from Baltimore's Promise estimates the Baltimore region is home to over 42,000 youth who are neither in school nor working. Capturing the attention of these young individuals and connecting them to meaningful gap-year opportunities, that also strategically meet the current and future needs of Maryland employers, is a crucial step in ensuring the success of the Corps experience.

HB 1016 would expand the allowed uses of Corps funds to include supporting important studies on the potential use and benefits of the program. Just about any kind of community service is mutually beneficial to students and communities, but our vision for MCP is bigger than just a volunteerism program. In its most robust form, MCP will connect gap year students to strategically selected positions, creating a pipeline to the state workforce which consists of diverse individuals with exceptional service experience and ties to Maryland communities.

As the law is currently written, MCP funds may be used to provide stipends and scholarships to program participants and to cover administrative expenses incurred by the overseeing Board. HB 1016 would authorize the use of MCP funds for studying strategic implementation of the program.

The Maryland Corps Program will keep our state at the national forefront of service and volunteerism, serving as a model for other states. It is essential that we properly implement the program to ensure its sustainability and success.

I urge a favorable report.

February 27, 2020