



Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony: SB 307 – Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship Program – Revisions

Testimony Submitted by: Dr. Kathleen Hetherington, President, Howard Community College

Position: Support

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On behalf of Howard Community College and my colleagues at Maryland's community colleges, I want to thank Senator Pinsky for his support in establishing the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship.

This was the first state scholarship designated specifically for high school students entering one of Maryland's 16 community colleges within two years of graduating from high school. I am pleased that the revisions in SB 307 will expand eligibility to all first-time college going students who meet the Promise Scholarship program criteria. This expansion of eligibility allows prospective community college students to have a pathway to success by having financial resources for tuition that were previously unavailable to them. As an educator and former financial aid officer, I know that time and money are the two things that stand in the way of students completing their degrees. Now, with the proposed revisions to the Promise Scholarship Program, citizens of Maryland will be able to attend college and realize their educational dreams and provide for themselves and their families. The impact of an educated workforce's positive impact on Maryland's economy cannot be underestimated.

This past year, I chaired a committee of financial aid officers and student affairs officers who were charged by the Maryland Community College Council of Presidents with carefully examining the implementation of the FY20 Promise Scholarship Program. There were a number of challenges with the rollout of the program. But there were also a number of issues regarding the original bill that negatively influenced students accepting the scholarship. Our committee highlighted these barriers to full implementation, along with a number of other recommendations, and discussed them with Secretary Fielder and his team from the Maryland Higher Education Commission and Senator Pinsky's staff. We are pleased to see that SB 307 addresses many of the concerns that our committee raised.

One of the main reasons many students did not accept a Promise Scholarship in FY20 was the service obligation. The current bill requires the Promise recipient to work in Maryland for one

year for every year an award is received or the scholarship converts to a loan. Asking students to make a commitment of this nature or face student debt is an unnecessary barrier. Eighty-eight percent of Maryland community college graduates stay and work in Maryland and this percentage has hardly changed over the last twenty years, therefore, the service obligation is unnecessary. We are pleased to see it removed in SB 307.

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) supports the provisions contained in SB 307 that expand the grade point average (GPA) eligibility so that initial awards can be based on a cumulative GPA of at least 2.3 on a 4.0 scale at the end of the first semester or the end of the senior year in high school or a 2.5 while enrolled at a community college. This revision will ensure the timely consideration for eligible applicants.

MACC also supports the revision regarding the order of the crediting of financial aid, namely state or federal student financial aid, other than a student loan, received by the student will be credited to the recipient's tuition before the calculation of a Promise Scholarship. Previously, if a student received institutional aid, for which they might have competed to receive, this would have possibly caused the student to be ineligible for a Promise Scholarship. Under the new provisions, students would be able to use funds of this nature to help pay for fees, books and supplies, room and board, and the host of other expenses related to college attendance. Fees alone can be quite substantial and they are not covered by the Promise Scholarship.

The Maryland community colleges are hopeful that with these revisions to the Promise Scholarship program, more students will qualify for the award and be willing to accept the award, especially with the removal of the onerous service obligation that could result in student debt.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide support for this important legislation.