



**Campaign for Free College Tuition**

**Testimony before the  
Maryland Senate Education, Health,  
and Environment Affairs Committee  
SB 307**

**Madhu Sidhu**

Maryland Policy Advisor

Campaign for Free College Tuition

February 4, 2020

I am Madhu Sidhu, Maryland Policy Advisor for the Campaign for Free College Tuition, a 501(c)3, a bipartisan organization, dedicated to making college tuition free in all 50 states. I had the honor of testifying before this Committee in 2018 in support of establishing the Maryland Community College Scholarship Program and am glad to be back to discuss the positive revisions contained in SB 307 to increase participation and community college enrollment.

Since 2016, the Campaign for Free College Tuition has conducted extensive public opinion research on state free college programs and our message to policymakers is simple:

*One, make college tuition free for those who are academically capable as universally available as you can, and two, don't ask students to jump through too many hoops to gain this benefit that voters of all political persuasions support.*

Requirements for minimal academic performance in order to be eligible for free tuition are among most important eligibility requirement of all those tested in CFCT polling with college and high school GPA scores garnering 69% support and 58% support, respectively. A pledge to work in-state however did not garner majority support in CFCT polling.

On the state level, data suggests that free college programs with relatively simple eligibility criteria have been the most successful in increasing community college enrollment. The Rhode Island Promise, which like Maryland's Community College Promise requires full-time enrollment and the maintenance of a 2.5 GPA in college, had a particularly positive impact on the enrollment of both low-income students and students of color. According to a Community College of Rhode Island official, first-time full-time students from low-income families more than doubled from 527 in the fall of 2016 (before free tuition) to 1,280 in the fall of 2018. Similarly, the enrollment numbers for first-time full-time students of color have nearly tripled from 355 in 2016 to 936 in 2018.

I believe similar community college enrollment gains are possible in Maryland with the passage of SB 307. The bill removes the perceived barrier of service requirements and creates an alternative pathway to initial Maryland Community College Promise eligibility by obtaining a 2.5 GPA in college.

In closing, I also implore members of this Committee to work with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission and community college officials to cohesively market the Maryland Community College Promise to high school students, their families and other residents. If additional funds are needed for this purpose, I hope that the General Assembly will make the necessary allocations.

CFCT looks forward to celebrating the success of the Maryland Community College Promise for many years to come.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



### Campaign for Free College Tuition

Mrs. Madhu Sidhu  
MARYLAND POLICY ADVISOR

✉ [msidhu@freecollegenow.org](mailto:msidhu@freecollegenow.org)  
☎ 410.708.7722  
🌐 [www.FreeCollegeNow.org](http://www.FreeCollegeNow.org)